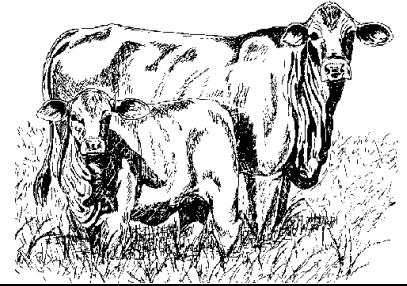




Forage/Livestock Newsletter



Polk County

Special-Fall, 2003

Florida Cattle Market Update is now available on the UF Ona Range Cattle REC Web site:
<http://rcrec-ona.ifas.ufl.edu/markets.html>

Coming Events:

- **Sept. 16-18**, Forage and Pasture Management School, Agri-Civic Center, Sebring
- **Sept. 19**, Central Florida Fall Forage Field Day, D & D Cattle Co., Groveland.
- **Sept. 25**, Florida Equine Institute and Allied Trade Show, Southeastern Livestock Pavilion, Ocala.
- **Sept. 27**, Florida Santa Gertrudis Sale, Polk County Agric. Center, Bartow.
- **Oct. 21-23**, Artificial Insemination (AI) School, Extension Office, Wauchula

Web Sites:

<http://www.cflag.com/> - Central Florida Livestock Agents Group

<http://sfbfp.ifas.ufl.edu/> - South Florida Beef Forage Program

Stress Relieving Weaning Strategies

Bovine respiratory disease (BRD) costs the beef industry more than \$1 billion annually in reduced performance, death loss, medicine costs, labor and reduced carcass value. Eliminating all cases of BRD is unrealistic, but the industry has made little progress over the years in reducing BRD incidence.

No one wants the headaches of dealing with sick cattle. So, why do feedlots continue to buy unweaned, unvaccinated (commodity) calves from multiple sources? There are two reasons -- such calves are abundant, and cheap. But, what many don't realize is that, after treating all the calves once and some calves multiple times, these "cheap" calves ultimately end up costing more than preconditioned calves.

Some producers lack the facilities and/or the feedstuffs to wean and precondition calves. And, many say they have no choice but to remove the calves from their dams and sell them without vaccinations, deworming or weaning. This may be true for some producers, but only a very small percentage.

While buying fully preconditioned calves is the goal of most feedlot owners, here are five options for ranchers between offering commodity and preconditioned calves:

Wean On Grass.

Work at the University of Missouri (UM) has shown that weaning calves onto grass with fence line contact to their dams can be an excellent option for farms or ranches that lack the facilities or the necessary feedstuffs. Over the past 20 years, this UM facility has had only four sick calves and no cases of BRD among its 4,500 fully preconditioned calves, with the calves typically gaining at least 1.5 lbs./day for the first 60 days.

Researchers in other areas of the U.S. have had similar results. We see this as a tremendously viable option for many herds across the country.



Early Vaccinations For BRD.

Conventional wisdom says vaccinating calves at a few months of age against BRD (IBR-BVD-PI3-BRSV) isn't effective due to maternal immunity blocking the vaccination. This conventional wisdom is wrong.

Work by Vic Cortese, a Pfizer Animal Health DVM, proved that protective immunity to IBR is stimulated by use of an approved modified-live product as early as one week of age. Check with your herd health veterinarian about using a viral BRD vaccine as calves go to grass or in the summer when fly control is undertaken.

Pre-Weaning Vaccination.

We would like to see calves held at home after weaning for a period prior to shipment. But if this isn't possible, vaccinating 2-3 weeks pre-weaning still makes sense. This allows the buyer of the bawling calves to booster them rather than expose the calves to the vaccines for the first time. This could help to bring a serious buyer back next year.

Anti-Nurse Devices.

After reading an article in *BEEF* ("The Weaning Two-Step," November 2001) about the use of an anti-nurse device to reduce the stress of weaning, we tried this technique on a group of calves.

The goal at weaning is to minimize stress on the calf as much as possible. All studies indicate that such stressors as feed changes, surgeries, commingling, etc., at the time of weaning increase the incidence of BRD.

Even in complete preconditioning programs, calves still have two stressors at weaning time -- separation from their dams and cessation of nursing. Using an anti-nurse device, stress is minimized because the calf is left on its dam during weaning.

In our small study, calves fitted with anti-nurse devices either were eating or lying down chewing their cud 12 hours after weaning, and their dams were out grazing. Meanwhile, control cows bellowed at the fence line while their calves bellowed and walked the fence. The stress level difference was dramatic.

Use of the anti-nurse device in a traditional preconditioning program could be as follows:

Two Weeks Prewean - BRD Vaccine

One Week Prewean - Place anti-nurse device

Weaning Day - Repeat BRD Vaccine

Deworm

Remove anti-nurse device

If backgrounding isn't feasible, calves could move to grass (Option 1) or to market in a reduced stress/vaccinated program.

For more on the anti-nurse device, go to www.quietwean.com.

Limited Nursing Options.

More than 30 years ago, we reduced weaning stress by allowing calves to nurse once daily for about a week before weaning. This is nearly impossible for a large ranch in range conditions, but many smaller herds successfully use it. The calves are limit-fed a complete ration that allows their rumen to adjust to the diet they'll eat in the feedlot.

Earlier Weaning.

Calves weaned at about 150 days of age tend to have fewer BRD problems than those weaned at 205 days or later. The nutrition options for these calves include high-quality forage or forage-plus-grain.

Another advantage of earlier weaning in spring-calving herds is that the cows tend to go into winter in better condition.

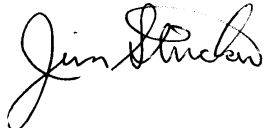


As the marketplace continues to discount commodity cattle, producers need to look at various options to reduce weaning stress. While a complete preconditioning program is the "gold standard" for health, complementary or alternative programs may have a place in your herd.

-- Mike Apley, DVM, Ph.D., Iowa State University; and W. Mark Hilton, DVM, Purdue University.

Source: Cow Calf Weekly, a cowherd management e-newsletter from Beef magazine 8/22/03

Sincerely,



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