Livestock and Forage Newsletter
January 2017

Tips for Spring Calving Herds:
(Information from “Beef Cattle Tips”)

- Calving season may begin towards the end of this month or the first of next month. Being prepared for calving is very important: OB gloves, OB lubricant, esophageal feeder, bottle and nipple, chain straps/chains, calf puller, sterile syringes and needles, batteries for flashlight or spotlight, old rags or blankets, toolbox to keep calving equipment, colostrum replacement, electrolytes, etc. Make sure all items are in good working order, haven’t expired, etc.

- Be prepared to make feed adjustments for nursing cows. Lactating cows require a 10-11% crude protein and 58-60% TDN diet MP391.

- Castrate male calves at birth or at 3 months processing. Bull calves are usually discounted $5 per hundred weight. Castration early in life is less stressful on the calf. Research with calves castrated at birth grow at similar rates of gain compared to their intact male pasture mates. In addition, male calves castrated by stocker producers following sale barn purchase are 2.5 times more likely to become sick than a steer calf purchased through a sale barn market.

- Don’t forget to collect calving records. Valuable records for selection and management include: body condition calving, calving difficulty score, calf gender, calf birth weight, and don’t forget to tag calves - records are less valuable when they cannot be linked to animals and herds.

- Switch to a high magnesium mineral to help prevent grass tetany for lactating cows on spring pastures Fact Sheet 3035.

Grass Tetany Can Become a Problem During Late Winter and Early Spring

- Grass tetany occurs most commonly in the months of February, March, and April.
- It normally occurs when cool season forages begin to regrow.
Grass tetany is due to an abnormally low level of magnesium in the cow's body.

Older lactating cows are more susceptible.

If heifers were breed 30 days prior to the cow herd last year, the heifer calving season should be in full swing.

Vaccinate replacement heifers 30 to 60 days before breeding season.

Now is a good time to evaluate and select sires for the spring breeding season for both mature cows and replacement heifers. Easy calving bulls are very important for breeding replacement heifers.

Provide free-choice mineral and fresh water.

**Breeding Soundness Evaluation**

- Have bulls tested for breeding soundness before spring breeding season begins - Fact Sheet 3046. Twenty percent of bulls fail a breeding soundness examination. The breeding soundness evaluation (BSE) is a practical method to identify bulls with less than satisfactory breeding potential. This evaluation should be conducted on every bull at least 30 to 60 days before each breeding season to allow enough time for replacement of deferred or unsatisfactory bulls.

**Pasture Management**

- **Soil fertility management**
  - Winter is a good time for correct imbalances in pH
  - Soil fertility and pH should be monitored regularly
    - Correcting pH will take several months so it is wise to check lime requirements before next year's growing season.

- **Soil sampling of pastures**
  - If you were not able to test soil fertility in fall, do so now to avoid fertility shortfalls once temperatures rise and forage begin to grow at a faster rate. Soil samples can be obtained easily and testing them is free of charge.
  - Collect at least 15 subsamples per pasture using a zig-zag course
    - Mix the subsamples then submit one composite sample to the county extension office.
    - Use appropriate crop code for proper fertilizer recommendations.
  - Refer to Fact Sheet 2121

- **Weed control**
  - Winter annual weeds such as buttercup, thistle, and henbit have germinated.
  - Start spraying pastures where there were problems in the past.
    - Late fall and winter spraying is very effective.
    - For identification and control recommendations, refer to MP 522.

- **Apply burn-down herbicide to dormant bermudagrass**
  - This is very important for keeping bermudagrass pastures clean of broadleaf weeds. Herbicide of choice is glyphosate.
  - Use rates according to the label; do not skimp with rates, the bermudagrass will not be affected if it is still dormant but weeds will be killed reliably.
  - Reapply herbicide if needed. Bermudagrass should not be mowed/grazed for 60 days after application, so time herbicide application accordingly.

- Clover and lespedeza can be overseeded during February into short-grazed fescue pastures. Inoculate seed. Consider strip or stripe seeding in difficult areas. Make sure soil test is good enough for clover. Demo project is available for agents.

- Initiate grazing of cool season legumes.
- Depending on use, cool season legumes can be grazed once they reach a canopy height of 12-18 inches.
- During spring weather warming, legumes grow vigorously and initiation of grazing can easily be missed.
- Focus on specific management goals of legumes: for adding soil organic matter, for establishing a long-term stand of annual legumes, or for optimum grazing utilization.
- To promote earlier greenup and grazing of fescue and winter annuals, fertilize specific pastures in February for grazing in March. Other pastures can be fertilized in March for spring. But don't apply N fertilizer where clovers are overseeded or where good clover exist.

**Grazing Management**

- Stockpiled fescue
  - Use grazing methods that avoid trampling of forage and ensure high forage utilization, such as strip grazing.
    - Strip grazing improves forage utilization and may double the number of grazing days compared to continuous grazing.
- Winter annual small grains/ryegrass
  - Begin grazing once canopy height is at least 8 inches.
  - Use grazing methods that avoid trampling of forage and ensure high forage utilization, such as rotational grazing or limit-grazing (limiting cow access time to annuals).
    - Under limit-grazing, cows are routinely pastured on dormant pasture or fed hay in a dry-lot, but are allowed to eat their fill from a limited-access winter annual pasture several times per week.
    - Limit-grazing of beef cows and calves on a mixture of wheat/rye/ryegrass (planted at 0.2 acre of per head) for two days per week produced the same cow, calf, and rebreeding performance as cows fed unlimited hay plus a supplement.
    - Limit-grazed cows also consumed 30 percent less hay during the winter feeding period.

**Hay Management**

- Protect hay when feeding to reduce waste. Feed hay in rings to reduce hay waste. Unrolling hay increases hay waste unless it is done on a limit-feeding basis.
- Consider using a temporary electric wire fence wire to reduce waste from trampling and increases utilization of the hay.
  - Unroll the bale, then string up an electrified polywire down the length of the line of hay.
  - Place the wire about 30 inches high over the hay.
  - Cattle will line up as if eating at a feed bunk.
- Feeding hay in various locations around a field is a cost effective way of maintaining, or possibly increasing soil P, K, and organic matter.
  - Each bale of hay contains substantial amounts of fertilizer nutrients and can enrich feeding areas.
  - On average, a typical 4x5 round bale has a fertility value approaching that of 100 lbs. of 17-17-17 fertilizer.

Sincerely,

Mike McClintock
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