FROM THE COUNTY AGENT’S DESK...

After a few weeks of being out of the office with our newborn, I’m glad to get to a break from diaper duty and resume some county agent duties in writing this newsletter. However, I will still be out of the office until after the first of the year. Don’t hesitate to call, though. Depending on your question, you’ll get directed to one of a few surrounding county agents, or if you’d like, feel free to email me at brunsick@uaex.edu or call 479-747-5437. As we settle in to the heart of hay feeding season, there’s still plenty of things to be done. Now is the time to repair and maintain equipment, fence, working facilities, etc., but don’t neglect to plan for spring. It’ll be here before we know it, and with it, plenty of other work. The old adage of “Failing to plan is planning to fail” certainly applies to farming as well. So, now is the time to make arrangements for materials and have some tentative dates on the calendar to get some things done! Here are the phone numbers for my fellow agents should you be unable to reach me.

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We’ll get you an answer to your questions one way or the other.

Sharp County Agent, Joe Moore - (870) 994-7363
Izard County Agent, Michael Paskewitz - (870) 368-4323
Baxter County Agent, Mark Keaton - (870) 425-2335

**Bermudagrass Hay Weed Control Demonstration**

Readers, I’m looking for a bermudagrass hay field to conduct a weed control demonstration/research plot. It would be a dormant application of glyphosate (Roundup) to show the benefits in cleaning up much of the early season junk that winds up in our first cuttings, such as cheat, ryegrass, and several broadleaf weeds. Our office would cover the cost of the herbicide and take care of laying out the plots and making the application.

I’d prefer that the field be located along a highway or major road in the county so it can be seen by other farmers, but it doesn’t absolutely have to. It doesn’t need to be a large acreage. The plots will easily take up less than ½ acre. Also, it needs to be a hay field and not a field that cattle will be grazing through, at least from late winter through the first cutting.

Not only does such an application get some of those undesirable species out of the bermudagrass, it also helps to release the bermuda sooner by opening up the canopy to more sunlight resulting in an early cutting. This, of course, means that a hay producer can then often get to that second cutting more quickly, too, before running out of spring rain.

For those that wish to do this on their own on an entire field, the recommendation is to apply 1 qt./acre of glyphosate (41%) while bermudagrass is dormant in February-early March. There is a small window to fit this application in. However, don’t solely rely on the calendar here. There have been years when it got warm early and bermuda was already breaking a little in February. Then, there have been times that it was delayed and this application could safely stretch on into March. A good rule of thumb, though, is to not do this after March 10th. The application needs to be made after some of the cool season species are starting to green up, but before the bermuda breaks dormancy. The greening up of the cool season species is going to happen before you can see it from the road, so get out of the truck and look closely. While doing this, you can also check to make sure that there’s not any green color showing in the bermuda close to the soil surface. Don’t fret over it too much, though. Even if you are a tad late, 1 quart/acre of glyphosate on bermuda will usually just suppress it and likely not wipe out the whole stand, especially that time of year.

If you’ve got any questions or if you’re willing and interested in letting me do the demonstration plots on your place, then please let me know as soon as possible, so I can get my plan together.
Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) updates

Much attention is being paid to the higher cost of beef, yet sales data and market research show demand for beef remains strong. Beef continues to be a cornerstone of the retail meat case, it's featured on almost every restaurant menu, and Americans continue to purchase beef, even at higher prices. New BQA Guidelines

The following set of BQA Guidelines represents recommendations and is the collaborative efforts of veterinarians, animal scientists, cattle industry leaders, production managers and producers to put forward a consensus opinion for achieving optimal outcomes. It should be understood that several different applications and techniques exist for the performance of many of these procedures. This set of guidelines is not intended to be exclusive of any one specific technique over another. These guidelines focus on the animal and are aimed to satisfy scientifically valid and feasible approaches to meeting cattle health and welfare needs.

Castration of Cattle

Castration of beef cattle is performed in many production systems to reduce inter-animal aggression and injuries, improve human safety, and avoid the risk of unwanted pregnancies in the herd. Methods of castration used in beef cattle include surgical removal of the testes, ischemic methods, and crushing and disruption of the spermatic cord.

Where practical, cattle should be castrated before the age of three months, or at the first available handling opportunity beyond this age. The use of method(s) that promote the well-being and comfort of cattle should be encouraged. It is recommended that all animals not used for breeding purposes be castrated and allowed to heal before ever leaving their farm of origin.

Producers may seek guidance from a veterinarian on the availability and advisability of analgesia or anesthesia for castration of beef cattle, particularly in older animals. Operators performing castration of beef cattle should be trained and competent in the procedure used, and be able to recognize the signs of complications.

Dehorning of Cattle (including disbudding)

Cattle that are naturally horned are commonly dehorned in order to reduce animal injuries and improve human safety. The selection of polled cattle is an alternative for horn management.

Where practical, cattle should be dehorned while horn development is still at the horn bud stage, or at the first available handling opportunity beyond this age. This is because the procedure involves less tissue trauma.

Methods of dehorning (disbudding) at the horn bud stage include removal of the horn buds with a knife or dehorning spoon, thermal cautery of the horn buds, or the application of chemical paste to cauterize the horn buds.
Producers may seek guidance from a veterinarian on the availability and advisability of analgesia or anesthesia for dehorning of beef cattle, particularly in older animals, where horn development is more advanced. Operators performing dehorning of cattle should be trained and competent in the procedure, and be able to recognize the signs of complications.

**Branding of Cattle**

Branding, ear-tagging, ear-notching, tattooing, and radio frequency identification devices (RFID) are methods of identifying cattle. Hot iron or freeze branding may be the only practical method of permanently identifying cattle. If cattle are hot iron or freeze branded, it should be accomplished quickly, expertly and with the proper equipment. BQA guidelines recommend branding on the hip area.

Cattle should never be branded on the face or jaw. Operators performing hot iron or freeze branding procedures may seek the guidance of a veterinarian, and should be trained and competent in the procedure, and be able to recognize the signs of complications.

**Tail Docking of Beef Cattle**

Tail docking has been performed in beef cattle to prevent tail tip necrosis in confinement operations. Research shows that increasing space per animal and proper bedding are effective means in preventing tail tip necrosis. Therefore it is not recommended for producers to dock the tails of beef cattle.

**Breeding the Heifer for Spring Calving Herds**

**DR. TOM TROXEL, EXTENSION BEEF SPECIALIST**

Due to the high price of cattle and the excellent growing condition, many cattle producers retained extra heifers to rebuild or to replace older cows in their herd. Raising high quality replacement heifers is an essential and major investment for the cow-calf producer. The replacement heifer becomes the genetic building block for the cow herd. With proper management a replacement heifer will become a fertile cow that produces a calf, annually, for a long time.

Many management steps and decisions must be made in the process of selecting and growing replacement heifers. Consequently, replacement heifers must pass a number of “production tests” to remain in the herd and, hopefully, become a member of the cow herd. Selection at weaning, development from weaning to first breeding, evaluation after first breeding and calving season and establishment of successful rebreeding are the “production tests” a heifer must pass. Heifers not meeting production targets should be culled at any point in the process.
Management from Breeding to Calving

For spring calving herds, this is the time of year to begin planning the breeding season for replacement heifers. Replacement heifers should be on a good health program. Contact your veterinarian to develop the right vaccination program for your replacement heifers.

Calving difficulty is of great concern with first-calf heifers, as it is the primary cause of calf losses at birth. The major causes of dystocia are an oversized calf or an undersized heifer. A large calf and/or a heifer with a small birth canal can cause calving problems. The general rule of thumb is that a female (heifer or cow) should be able to calve 8% of their body weight. Therefore, if a heifer weighs 900 lbs. at calving, she should be able to deliver a calf weighing 72 lbs. at birth. Two methods can be used to reduce the risk of calving difficulty. The first is to be sure the pregnant heifer is properly “grown-out” from breeding to calving. Pelvic area of heifers can be measured at yearling age, and those with small areas should be culled.

Another method of reducing dystocia is by reducing birth weights. Select low birth weight or high calving ease EPD bulls for breeding heifers. Birth weight information on a bull and his sire can be effective in reducing birth weights as well. Be very careful in selecting bulls if no prior calving information is known. Many yearling bulls are used on heifers satisfactorily, but the old belief that a young bull will sire smaller calves is not true. To reduce the risk of injury, however, smaller bulls should be used. Bulls should not weigh more than 170% to 180% of the heifer’s body weight. If heifers weigh 800 lbs. at the start of the breeding season, the bull selected to breed those heifers should not weigh more than 1,400 lbs.

It is recommended to breed replacement heifers 20 to 30 days before the cow herd. This permits more time and labor to be given to heifers during the calving season. Heifers can be watched more closely and assisted if necessary to reduce calf death losses. It also allows for a longer period from calving to rebreeding, which is needed by first-calf heifers to regain body condition and initiate estrous cycles.

The breeding season for replacement heifers should be approximately 45 days. Heifers should be checked for pregnancy 60 to 90 days after the end of the breeding season, and all open heifers should be culled. This increases selection pressure for high fertility and also ensures a short first-calving season.

Heifers need to gain 0.8 to 1.0 lb. per day from the time they are bred until calving. This can usually be achieved on pasture and mineral supplementation alone. At calving, heifers should weigh 85% of their expected mature body weight and be in good body condition (BCS = 6 to 7). If heifers are in thin body condition, they should be placed on a higher level of nutrition. It is difficult to improve heifer body condition as calving approaches, and it is especially difficult after calving. Improving condition will improve colostrum production and quality, will decrease post-calving anestrus period and increase the livability of their calves.
“Starving" heifers prior to calving does not reduce calving problems. Underfeeding can cause poor milk production, reduced weaning weights, lower rebreeding rates and increased calving difficulties. It also is not desirable for heifers to be over conditioned. Heifers which are over conditioned at calving have greater calf losses, excessive feed cost, depressed milk production, decreased life span and rebreeding difficulties.

Summary

Genetically speaking the replacement heifer should be the best animal on the farm and, therefore, is the genetic building block for the future. Taking extra management steps such as selecting a low birth weight bull, breeding heifers 20 to 30 days before the cow herd, managing heifers so they continue to gain 0.8 to 1.0 lb. per day until calving, and maintain good body condition (BCS = 6 to 7) will allow the heifer to perform at her genetic potential.

**Tri-County Arkansas Beef Improvement Program (ABIP) Workshop in Salem**

Sharp, Fulton, and Izard County Extension Offices will be hosting an ABIP workshop in Salem at the Hickinbotham-Miller exhibit building at the Fulton County Fairgrounds on the evenings of February 24th and 26th. The first night will cover cow/calf operation budgets and basic herd health education. The second night will strictly cover heifer management. Our speakers will be Extension Animal Science faculty. These workshops have been a great success for producers around the state, and I hope that many of you can plan to attend. We will begin at 5:30 p.m. with the meal and wrap up around 8 p.m. both nights. In order to plan for the meals, pre-registration is required. Registering is a commitment to attend both nights. The total cost is $10 to be paid upon registering (not at the door). Please stop by the office to register and pay your $10 fee by February 13th. Or, you’re welcome to mail in your name and registration. Make checks payable to Fulton County Extension. Address is: Fulton County Extension, P.O. Box 308, Salem, AR 72576.

**Private Applicator Training (PAT) for Restricted Use Pesticides**

Local farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural producers who wish to renew an expiring pesticide license or receive a first time private pesticide applicator license will have the opportunity to receive the required training. Some of the folks that are up for recertification will have gotten a letter from the State Plant Board notifying them that their certification is up.

The training will be held in Salem on February 10th, 2015 at 6:00 p.m. at the Fulton County Fairgrounds in the Hickinbotham-Miller building.

Pesticide Applicator Training is approximately a two-hour course to certify Arkansas agricultural producers who wish to purchase and apply Restricted Use Pesticides (RUP’s). However, the information presented could also be
useful for anyone interested in learning more about pesticide regulations, labeling, application equipment and safety issues. This training is NOT for certification of commercial (for-hire) pesticide applicators!

There is a $10 per person fee which must be paid at the door at the time of training. This fee is not related to the licensing fees charged by the State Plant Board. It is only for the training. The fee for the license is $10 for one (1) year or $45 for five (5) years. That amount you will pay in later to the State Plant Board, not the Fulton Co. Extension Office. Checks or exact cash preferred.

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All of the meetings and activities listed in the newsletter are open to all interested individuals.