New Secretary at Izard County Extension Service

LeVeda Tate retired November 30, 2015 after 13 years with Izard County Extension Service. We have hired a new secretary Christy Tomlinson. Christy started January 19, 2016 and is a great asset to our county program.

Pesticide Applicator Training

If you need a Private Applicator License to purchase or apply pesticides used in the production of an agriculture commodity. Please call our office and let us know. We will be holding one more PAT training session this spring if you did not make the first one.

The difference a year can make

A year ago a 400-450 lb unweaned steer was bringing over $3.00/lb. Today that same steer is bringing $1.80 - $2.00/lb. Lower fuel prices have helped decrease some operating costs. Fertilizer prices have re-adjusted as a result of lower fuel prices. While prices are lower than they were a year ago it is hard to say what they will do over the next few weeks. A few things that may affect fertilizer prices are the amount of corn acres to be planted, the number of deferred planting acres due to narrow margins, decreased fertilizer imports, and farmers applying minimal amounts due to narrow margins. All these things are out of our control. What we can control, is the management decisions and practices that we apply to our operation to add value and pounds efficiently to the calves we produce.

- Defined calving season (saves money on vaccine, labor, trucking, and more ways than I can list)
- Utilize implants (U of A research documents an average increase of 17 lbs/ head)
- Dehorn calves
- Castrate bull calves
- Vaccination program
- Wean calves (if applicable)
- Keep records and cull cows that don’t breed or raise a less than average calf

I like this next article as it talks about how hard times make us more open minded, creative, and critical of our own operation.

If you do the same exact thing, the same exact way, you will get the same exact results.
I can't remember a time when the grass has been as green, the cows have been as fat, ponds have been as full, and producers have been as worried about their future and the future of agriculture as a whole. The really frustrating part about the predicament we find in mid-2008 is that so many of the contributing factors are beyond our control. It is easier to deal with a crisis when it is an act of Mother Nature (e.g., the drought of 2005 and 2006) than when fingers can be pointed at something tangible (e.g., individuals, groups or policies) that results in hardships, however unintended they may be. Seemingly, the only silver lining is that calf prices have stabilized and are staying relatively strong.

At the forefront of every agricultural producer's mind right now are the three F's: FUEL, FEED and FERTILIZER. There has been considerable brainstorming conducted at all levels of agriculture (producer, industry and academia), and there are no easy solutions to these problems. However, to implement a "glass half-full" attitude, there are opportunities that come with these hardships, but you have to be in a position to take advantage of them.

Specific to cattle producers, there are management practices that cost nothing or very little to implement, but can have dramatic financial benefits. A truly profitable cattle producer is one that not only does a good job of increasing revenue, but monitors costs as well - a point that far too often gets overlooked. These practices are often discussed in industry publications, producer meetings and in personal interactions. However, I have found that the harder the times, the more open minded we get. So, here again are some strategies for your consideration.

- **Dehorn calves prior to marketing.** I bought a pair of dehorners the other day for around $20, and I have only seen a couple ever broken. Data collected by Oklahoma State University suggests that by doing this simple procedure, you will increase sale prices by $3/cwt.

- **Castrate bull calves prior to marketing.** This requires minimal labor, but, by doing so, data indicate that sale prices will be raised by about $3.50/cwt.

- **Cull open cows.** It is important to optimize cow weight and flesh when doing so. There are times when it makes sense to feed a cow to increase flesh or get to a better market. However, each year is different, so calculate your costs and let the numbers answer this question.

- **Pull your bulls or cull later-calving cows.** Smaller producers may choose the latter because a place to put a bull is lacking, while larger producers can usually dedicate infrastructure to bulls during the off-season very easily. The point here is that, regardless of size, this practice can be implemented. The resulting "defined" calving season will save in both labor and feed costs, not to mention a more uniform calf crop.
Cattle Management Practices For Difficult Times

• **Produce calves to fit a predetermined market.** This is a frame of mind and starts with your breeding program. In times like these, you need to have a really good reason not to have crossbred cows in your pasture, running with a really good bull that you know something about.

**Keep records to help make management and marketing decisions.** Simply keeping first and last calf birth dates opens marketing options and doesn't take a lot of effort.

Obviously, this is not an all-encompassing list and you may be thinking, "How come he didn't mention this or that?" That's the point of this article - to get you thinking of ways to be more efficient without spending a lot of time or money. Being creative and critical will go a long way in these difficult times. I suggest that, if you are not doing the things listed above, you have a pretty good place to start.

**U.S. Cattle Inventory Increases**

USDA-NASS reported a January 1, 2016 cattle inventory in-line with expectations in terms of year-over-year percentage growth. The nation’s total cattle and calf inventory stood at 92 million head, up 3.2% year-over-year and the largest since 2011’s. The beef cowherd grew by 3.5%, exceeding 30 million head for the first count since January 1, 2012. Heifers being held for breeding purposes were up 3.3% from a year ago, a nearly 200,000 head rise from the large count of a year earlier. A larger calf crop was produced in 2015, up 780,000 head or 2.3% above 2014’s and the biggest since 2011.

There were two surprises in the report. First, the report implied the number of cattle on feed in the smaller feedlots (those under 1000 head capacity and often referred to as “farmer feeders”) after tending to become less-and-less interested in feeding cattle during most recent years ramped-up production during 2015. The second surprise was large revisions downward in data for prior years including reducing the size of the 2014 U.S. calf crop. An even larger calf crop will be produced in 2016. This year, steer and heifer slaughter numbers will clearly be posting year-over-year increases, with the largest percentage increases occurring in the second half of the calendar year. But, it will take a few years for the full impacts of more cows and heifers producing calves and later-on animals for harvest. Besides steers and heifers processed into beef, an important source of U.S. beef tonnage comes from cull cows slaughtered. The LMIC forecasts year-over-year increases in U.S. Federally Inspected cow slaughter in both 2016 and 2017. However, levels of cow slaughter are forecast to remain below the drought-induced huge levels posted annually from 2007 into 2014. So, the increase in beef produced from steers and heifer slaughter is expected to be larger than beef from cows. It is important to note, that U.S. beef production in 2017 will likely be at or below 2013’s level.
The truck in the driveway has a VIN, the vaccine in the refrigerator has a lot number, but does the cow and her calf in the field have a tag? According to the most recent NAHMS survey, cow and herd identification is least common when herd size was less than 50 cows. Based on their survey, 41 percent of small farms do not have individual cows identified or have a herd identification. The report also indicated 61 percent of the operations with less than 50 cows did not identify calves. Calf identification also occurred less frequently than cow identification on farms with more than 50 cows. Whether it’s for marketing purposes, theft prevention, or tracking productivity, individual animal and herd identification is something all cattle producers should adopt. Identification systems work best when they include a combination of permanently affixed id’s such as brands or tattoos and temporarily affixed id’s such as plastic ear tags.

With cow and calf values exceeding $1,000, Arkansas ranchers have begun to express more interest in branding as a theft deterrent and is accomplished using hot irons or cold irons. Branding is a highly visible traditional method of permanently identifying original ranch ownership as well as individual animal identification. Branding has been used in Arkansas markets to identify cows that were destined for slaughter during brucellosis eradication and is used today for tracking live cattle originating from countries such as Mexico and Canada. Arkansas, unlike some states, does not require branding and branding is not very common in the state. Before designing a ranch brand and using this method of identification, contact the Arkansas Livestock and Poultry Commission. Ranch brands must be unique to each ranch and must be registered.

The plastic ear tag is the most common form of highly visible individual animal identification used on Arkansas ranches. Tags are often a simple numerical sequence for identity and require a one-piece or two-piece tag applicator gun. Blank tags and tag markers allow for customized tagging or tags can be special ordered to meet id needs.

Other common forms of identification include metal tags, electronic id tags (EID), and tattooing. There is a certainty when it comes to plastic ear tags and that certainty is some cows will lose them. Adopting a secondary form of identification such as metal tags or tattoos is a good practice. One might be surprised at how easy it is to misidentify cows that have lost tags, even in herds with less than 50 cows.
Choosing a system of id to use seems to be a lot easier than choosing the actual identifier. For tags, the sequential numbering system is common. Some ranches tag females sequentially as they enter the mature herd. Some adopt the practice of tagging calves with a number that matches their dam while others tag calves sequentially at birth or during processing and use records to relate calf id with dam and sire id. When using this format, replacement heifers will be re-assigned a number when they enter the breeding herd to prevent number duplication.

Another format incorporates a leading year value for all ids followed by a number sequence that often represents birth order. For example id 810 may be the id of a mature cow and this also indicates she was born in 2008 and was the 10th calf born that year. Her calf may be tagged 425 which indicates the 25th calf born in 2014. This is a very practical method of identifying individuals and does not require id re-assignment for replacement heifers. However, there are two concerns with using a leading number to represent ‘year’. First, there may be duplication if any females are kept in the herd for more than 10 years. By example, 210 may be the 2-year-old or the 12-year-old. A person could probably distinguish the one from the other when looking at the females “in the field”, but couldn’t when looking at the females “on-paper”. A second problem that arises when using a number to represent ‘year’ is software programs may drop leading zeros. Spreadsheets are often used to keep records and by default, a cow entered as 0100 will be saved as 100 unless the entry is formatted as text.

An alternative approach to using a leading number to represent year is to use letter designations for year. There is an international year/letter designation for animal id. The year 2014 is designated B and C, D, and E represent 2015, 2016, and 2017. This system excludes letters I, O, Q, and V to avoid error. This system helps circumvent the previously mentioned issues. Branding individual id becomes more of an issue when incorporating up to 22 letters. Although the system appears near perfect, records beyond 21 years could create duplication that would affect cow performance indexes such as MPPA (most probable producing ability).

Regardless of the id system used, make use of the system. A well planned out id system that individually identifies all inventory (cows, bulls, and calves) becomes the foundation for performance based replacement heifer selection and cow culling.
Coming Soon!

Little Red River Beef Cattle Conference
March 17, 2016
Pruitt’s Mid-State Stockyards
Damascus, Arkansas

Conference Agenda

11:30 a.m. Registration and lunch

12:15 p.m. Introductions and Welcome
Danny Griffin, Bert Leder, Cecil Oursbourn

12:30 p.m. So where does the market go from here?
Ross Pruitt, U of Tennessee-Martin

1:15 p.m. How to build a successful fly control program
Kelly Loftin, U of A System Division of Agriculture

1:45 p.m. Break

2:00 p.m. Reproductive technologies to improve your herd
Rick Rorie, U of A System Div of Agriculture

2:45 p.m. Common cattle diseases and how to prevent them
Heidi Ward, U of A System Division of Agriculture

3:30 p.m. Evaluation and adjourn

$20 per person. Register at the door.
Contact your county extension office for more information.

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Call 711 for Arkansas Relay.