The Stampede

Beef and Forage Newsletter

Four States Cattle Conference

Mark your calendars for December 3rd. The Extension Services from Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Texas have joined together to conduct a day-long beef cattle workshop at the Ag Learning Center at the Four States Fairgrounds in Texarkana.

Registration and the Trade Show will start at 8 am. The program will begin promptly at 9 am. An excellent panel of speakers will be on hand with the following topics: “What does Mother Nature have in store? A long range look at the weather”; “Cattle Market Outlook”; “Current Tendencies for Parasite Control”; “Utilizing Baleage in the Beef Herd”; “Today’s Look at Cow Size and Efficiency”; and a Cattle Handling Demonstration. There will be several breaks in the program so that participants can visit the tradeshow.

There is a registration fee of $20 per person if pre-registered by November 19. Cost at the door will be $30 per person. This includes a BBQ lunch.

To register for the program, complete the enclosed registration form and mail it with your check to the address provided.

Pesticide Applicator Certification Scheduled

A private-use pesticide certification training will be held on Monday, December 2 at 6:00 pm at the Polk County Fairgrounds. Any agriculture producer who would like to be certified to purchase restricted use pesticides for use on their farm should make plans to attend. Certification through this program will allow a producer to purchase a license from the Arkansas State Plant Board to purchase any restricted use pesticides. You will be certified to purchase a license for 5 years. This can be done by paying $45 for a 5-year license or you can pay $10 each year and receive a license good for a year at a time.

There is no need to pre-register. Just arrive at the commercial building at the fairgrounds prior to 6:00 pm. The training lasts approximately 2.5 hours. All necessary paperwork will be provided. There is a $10 training fee assessed at the door.

If you have any questions, contact the extension office at 479-394-6018.
Discount Hay Analysis Offered

Dr. Paul Beck has once again offered discount hay analysis for any producers wanting to learn more about producing and supplementing hay for beef cattle production.

He has graciously offered to process up to 5 samples per producer for $25. This is a savings of $65 per 5 samples over normal lab fees. There is a catch! You must be willing to attend a seminar to learn about your results and help you make a feeding plan to best utilize your hay for your livestock.

If you would like to participate in this program, please submit your hay samples to the office no later than Thursday, December 12th at 5:00 pm. Checks should be made to Polk County CES.

You can pull hay samples by hand or by using the hay probe available for checkout at the office. The hay probe will take a more accurate core sample but for convenience, it may be easier for you to hand pull a sample than using the hay probe. If you hand pull, it is very important that you pull from several bales, mix it together and fill a one gallon ziplock bag. If you use the hay probe, sample 10 bales from each cutting of hay you wish to test and submit in a quart or gallon size bag. You will not have nearly as much hay in the bag using the probe. That is okay. It is cut into smaller pieces by the action of the probe.

The educational workshop has been set for Thursday, January 9th at 6:00 pm at the Lime Tree Restaurant meeting room in Mena. Buffet will be provided for each person submitting 5 samples or more for the program. All other participants are Dutch-treat.

Beef and Forage Workshop

Mark your calendars and hold the dates for the annual Polk County Beef and Forage short course. The dates and location is set, the topics are not! We have a change this year. The short course will be held at the Wickes Elementary School cafeteria on Thursday, March 13, Tuesday, March 18, and Thursday, March 20. Each night will begin at 6:30 and last until around 8:30. If you have attended these before, you know that we take current topics of interest to beef and forage producers and present 30 to 45 minute presentations about that topic. I utilize some of our extension specialists and researchers to bring the latest best management practices to you.

Here is where I need you: are there any specific topics that you would be interested in hearing? I always have a variety of topics to choose from so I can certainly fill the time slots but if you have a need for a certain topic, I am sure your neighbor does too. Just let me know by early January and we will see what we can do about getting something lined up to meet that need.

Meet and Eat Workshops

Another plan I have for getting information out to you all is to have small informal meetings over a breakfast, lunch, or dinner time. These would be probably one-topic sessions held at a restaurant and would be dutch treat for participants. I will set up a series of these based on feedback from you.

My general thought right now is to have them at the Lime Tree in Mena during the month of February. We would probably meet 3 or 4 times during the month at your preferred meal time. The majority of responses will be the winner! I have a lot of ideas for topics but if you have something that needs to be addressed, let me know.

If you think this is a good idea and would be interested in participating in meetings like this, please let me know.

I will be waiting to hear feedback from you on both of the previous newsletter entries. Feel free to call me at 479-394-6018, email me at cvaught@ueax.edu, or stop by the office and provide your input. I like to try new things. I know that all of us are busy with many different projects. Hopefully, this will be another way to provide educational topics to help you be a more efficient and effective agriculture producer.
Farm Pond Management Field Day in the Works

I get lots and lots of questions each year about a variety of problems with managing farm ponds. There is lots of great information out there that would be useful for many of our county farmers. I am working on scheduling a field day in the spring to address some of the common problems and concerns of farm pond management. Topic for the program will include such things as algae and weed control; fish population management; clearing muddy ponds; sealing leaky ponds; and alternative livestock watering options. If you have other suggestions, I would be glad to address them. If you want to make sure you are on the interest list for updates about the planning for this program, call and tell Sue to add you to the list.

I am in need of a good location for the program. I would like to select a place with a good sized pond that is well established and encountering some of the problems mentioned above. We would also need to have some kind of shelter nearby for use for the presentations. If you think you have a good location, give me a call. We will see what we can work out on a program.

Did Thistles Take Over at Your House this Year???

The past few years of dry weather and reduction of forage competition has allowed some tough weeds to take over. The thistle population certainly boomed this year. We have three varieties of thistle that cause problems for us in our area. The one that has been around the longest is the yellow thistle. This thistle has a large stalk and light green, smooth leaves with stickers. It has fewer blooms per plant than the other two. This is the original pasture pest that we have had the longest of the thistles. The bull thistle is probably the least common in the area but is still a problem. It has a different shaped bloom than the others. It looks somewhat like a man’s old timey shaving brush. The dark green leaves are covered in fuzz with stickers on the margins. The third thistle is the one getting all of the attention. It is the musk thistle. This thistle has very spiny leaves and produces many flowers per plant. It is light green and the actual leaves are smooth but the margins of the leaves are covered in very course spines.

The good news is that all of these thistles have basically the same growth habits and can be controlled with the same methods and products. If you had a problem with them this year and didn’t do anything to control them, it is pretty likely you will see the same problem this coming year.

Thistles can be a biennial, a winter annual or an annual. Plants typically overwinter as rosettes and send up flowering stalks the following spring, then can flower through October. Seeds mature and can begin dispersing in 7-10 days of flowering. A single plant can produce as many as 11,000 seeds. The seeds can remain viable for up to ten years. Thistles germinate when conditions are right and can stay in rosette form most of the year. It is real common to have live plants in your pastures in rosette form from August until March. When temperatures start warming in late March and April, the plants bolt and start sending up their flower stalks. The ideal time to control the plant is while it is in the rosette stage. Once the plant hits bolt stage, you are only getting revenge! It has used your soil nutrients and the flower seed will probably go ahead and mature even if you spray it. The most effective and economical herbicide to use is plain...
2,4-D. In rosette form, a quart per acre is more than enough to do a great job. If you want a target month for control, February is probably the best month. Realize that controlling thistle is not a one shot deal. There are millions of seed produced each year and the seed load in your soil may be high. Try to be diligent in scouting and spraying when you identify problem areas.

If you need help deciding what products to use or calibrating your spray rig, don’t hesitate to give me a call. I will be glad to help.

Smart Ways to Save Bucks on the Farm

Cattle prices are good but the cost of producing beef is also pretty high! Do you know what it is costing you to produce and wean a calf on your farm? There are a lot of factors to consider when you start looking at the bottom line. First of all, you have GOT to keep records and NOT records in your head...written records on your cows and their calves. Ear tag them and keep records of calving dates. There is no way to measure a moving target. If you don’t know the exact age of a calf, there is no way to know what his growth rate is. If that cow is not having a calf every 365 days or less, she is costing you money. If you don’t have identification on her and keep records, you can’t keep track of time. Use a defined calving season. You think calving year round is working for you? Me and a LOT of research can prove you wrong. Pregnancy check your cows. If a cow misses a year of calving on your farm, she NEVER EVER, gets back to producing “in the black” for you. She is a free-loader! Fertility check your bulls. It only takes one time of a missed or really short calf crop due to bull infertility to break a farmer of this one. Soil test and follow fertilizer recommendations. You have to be a grass farmer before you can ever be a cattle farmer. Beef is a byproduct of grass production. Hay test and feed your cowherd and calves based on the results of your hay test. You may be producing high enough quality hay to cut back ALL supplementation – that should be your goal! The highest cost on a beef cattle farm is supplemental feed. If you don’t need it, don’t buy it! On the other hand, if you need supplemental feed because of low quality forage, you can cost yourself a calf crop by NOT feeding to meet the herd requirements. There are many, many other simple things you can adopt to do better with your bottom line.

Educate yourself! Just because you have always done it that way, and dad did it that way, and grandpa did it that way, doesn’t always make it the right way. Research identifies best management practices all the time that are different than what you may be doing traditionally. Take advantage of this knowledge and make the changes that will keep you in business as a cattle producer. We need beef producers in Polk County and in Arkansas. The last thing I want to do is end up with our county all planted in trees and having to buy beef from Brazil or Argentina because they are staying on top of new technology and production practices!

Extension Office Information

Most of you know that our office has a wealth of information on a huge number of topics. Sometimes it is simply mindboggling. At least it boggles mine! One of the most important things we do as county agents is provide local accessibility to information gathered through research all across the nation. Many states have had to change their extension system because of decreases in funds supporting their programs. We have been very fortunate in Arkansas. Our program is still available in EVERY county in the state. Our county programs are supported by our county government as well as at the state level through the department of higher education. We still get some of our funding through the USDA, although that has decreased significantly over the years I have worked for extension.

I say all of this to say that we hope we are making an impact in your agriculture enterprise. That is what we are here for! It is very hard to know from my end that you have adopted practices that you have learned about. If you have adopted new ways of doing things that extension has taught you through any of our educational efforts, let me know. This is even more effective if the changes you have made are saving you money, protecting your resources, or allowing you to be more effective or efficient with your agriculture enterprise. In a world where “accountability” is the buzzword, we really need to let decision makers know that the extension service is important to you and your operation. Give us a call or stop by and let us know. I’ve done this a lot of years and I sure hope I have made some differences for you all!
**Selecting Replacement Heifers**

With the selloff because of the drought of 2011 and 2012, most of us are in a rebuilding phase with our cowherds. This is the standard across the nation. We know that it cost a small fortune to put a heifer into production in the herd but there simply aren’t a lot of alternatives to rebuilding the herd numbers. Here are a few tips to help you decide which heifers will be your best bet. Ideally, you would select heifers from your best cows. That takes the record keeping I mentioned earlier in this newsletter. Choose the heifers that are born earliest in your calving season that have a good rate of gain, from cows that wean a calf every 365 days, and produce 50% of their bodyweight at weaning. Research shows that these early-born heifers will continue to lead the pack as cows. Big is not always best. Remember that large mature weights in a cowherd means more feed and forage required to maintain her body condition. Most of our local forage resources are adequate for a 1200 pound cow. You need to manage your replacement heifers to breed at 12-14 months of age. They should be about 60% of their mature body weight at this time. Plan to breed your replacement heifers with calving ease bull starting a month before your regular calving season. This will give them an extra 30 days to recover and fit into the calving season perfectly for their second calf. Be sure to calfhood vaccinate for brucellosis and follow a good vaccination plan to keep them healthy and growing.

If you need more specific information on replacement heifer management or vaccination schedules for your cowherd, come by and pick up the fact sheet Selection and Management of Beef Replacement Heifers FSA3076 and Beef Cattle Herd Health Vaccination Schedule FSA3009.

**Storing Vaccines Properly**

Several of you have taken part in one of the studies we have conducted on monitoring the temperature of your refrigerator where you store your vaccines. This has been an interesting demonstration across the state. Results have shown that of the 180 refrigerators tested across the state, only 27% hold the proper temperature of 35-45 degrees F greater than 95% of the time. This means that 75% of the vaccine storage refrigerators tested is potentially ruining your vaccines before you ever get it into the cow. Talk about a waste of time and money! This information is collected using a DATA LOGGER. This is a tiny computer chip that measures temperature every 10 minutes. It allows us to see the consistency of your refrigerator temperature over a 48 hour period.

If you are interested in testing your vaccine storage temperature, let me know. I can set up a schedule to borrow the Data Logger from the state office and pass it around the county for 30 days or so. There is a short survey that goes along with it. It is simply to use. The hard part is remembering you have it in your refrigerator!

**There is an APP for That!**

One of the most popular topics at our Beef and Forage short course last spring was a program about “apps” that are available to people using smart phones and ipads on the farm. If you have joined the technology generation and are using a smartphone, there are several low cost and mostly free applications that can be very useful on the farm.

Here are a few examples: Planimeter ($3.99) – app that allows you to measure acreage on your property. I had one success story on this one already. A farmer had thought he was spraying a 25 acre field for years. Once he actually measured using Planimeter, he realized that that field was only 19 acres and he had been over mixing chemicals for weed control. This has allowed him to cut down waste while spraying. Weed ID Guide – (free) from the University of Missouri; TankMixCalc – (free) calculates tank spray mixes and keeps track of spray records; iHerd – (free) allows you to keep track of herds, assign pastures, track treatments, purchases, etc; Beef Cow BCS – (free) Track and organize body condition scores for your beef herd. Snap a cow’s photo, compare to reference images, add an ear tag number, pasture name and save the score for future comparison.

There are lots more! This is just a small sample. More are being developed all the time. Do a search on your smart phone. There may be some in other areas that would help simplify your life!

**New Website Coming!**

Arkansas Extension has been working on a new and improved website for our organization for about 3 years. We are hoping that by mid-February we will have a website that will be updated and much more useful for all of our clientele. Check it out at [www.uaex.edu/polk/](http://www.uaex.edu/polk/) Keep checking back, it will get better with time!
Carla Vaught
County Extension Agent-Staff Chair
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Office Contact Information

The Polk County Extension Office is located on the corner of DeQueen and Hickory Street in Mena

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Our phone number is (479) 394-6018

All meetings and activities announced in this newsletter are open to all eligible persons without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability, marital or veteran status, or any other legally protected status. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (large print, audiotapes, etc.) should notify the county Extension office (or other appropriate office) as soon as possible prior to the activity.