

July 19, 2011

COWCHIP

DATES TO REMEMBER:

July

- 21 Board of Directors Meeting, Vermilion Parish Cattlemen's Association, 7:30 p.m.
Abbeville American Legion Hall, Accept bids on Ryegrass and Clover Seed
- 28 Dean Lee Field Day, 9:00 a.m., Alexandria

August

- 22 Start off Master Cattle Producer Classes

CURING HAY IN RAINY WEATHER:

What a difference a month makes. A month ago we were worried about supplementing short pastures, making plans for early weaning and wondering if we'd ever get enough growth to harvest some hay. Now we're worried about finding a long enough rainless window to dry hay. The grass is growing fast and the nutrient content is shrinking at a similar rate.

Tonnage is especially important since most ranchers missed the normal late May or early June cutting due to limited growth. The fear of losing this cutting to rain is understandable. Decisions to harvest hay should be based on weather outlook, factors affecting drying time, condition of the meadow and time left in the season.

With rain forecast everyday it's hard to decide to cut hay. However, we maximize yield and quality by harvesting multiple times each season. We do have time to make at least two good cuttings. Certainly we need to be looking for a change in weather pattern, so even if there is a 30% chance of rain forecast, it is less likely to get rained on. There is a time probably sometimes in mid to late August where a hard decision may be needed. Do we continue to wait and give up on two cuttings for a sure shot one cutting in the fall or do we take a risk on losing the grass we've accumulated so that we can make a second higher quality cutting in the fall. The problem with continuing to wait is that we'll make hay that is just a filler and because as grasses mature growth slows, total tonnage won't be much more than if we cut it, lost it and allowed for regrowth. Yes watching for the perfect weather is understandable but there comes a time when it's probably best to take the risk and try for two cuttings.

Several factors affect curing time - temperature, humidity, moisture content of the grass when mowed and management of the mowed grass. Generally hay with a moisture content of 20% or less will not spoil during storage. Ideally a moisture content of 15% should be the goal.

Hay with a moisture content of 25% or more provides an excellent environment for growth of aerobic microorganisms, causes the breakdown of nutrients in the hay and more importantly heat to build up. Temperatures of 150° or more cause proteins and carbohydrates in the hay to lose digestibility. Additionally, wet hay can catch fire.

There is no substitute for experience in determining when hay is dry enough. Moisture meters are not accurate enough and only let you know that you are close. You should use a test bale to check with a moisture meter. Twisting a bundle of hay with your hands will tell you that the hay is safe to bale. If the stems crack when twisted the hay is dry enough. However, it doesn't let you know the earliest safe baling time. And there is a procedure using a microwave that is very accurate but also time consuming.

In weather patterns like we are experiencing now it is just as important to get to the proper moisture levels quickly as it is to get there at all. Follow these tips to help speed up drying time:

- Cut hay in the morning as soon as the dew dries. This may get you an extra days drying time when compared to afternoon starts.
- Use a mower with a hay conditioner. Conditioners can reduce drying time by 25%. For small stemmed grasses like Bermuda an impellor or flail type is best. A roller crimper is best suited to larger stemmed grasses like pearl millet or sorghum sudan or for clovers.
- Use the whole field to dry your hay. Spread the harvested swath out wide.
- Use a tedder or fluffer wisely. A fluffer can reduce drying time by 15-30%. The best time to fluff is the first morning after harvest. Running a fluffer after the dew has dried or when the forage is too dry leads to leaf loss. The leaves contain the most nutrients.

If the threat of rain is imminent and the hay is at least close to dry, a hay preservative can be used to prevent heating. Propionic acid (an organic acid found in the rumen of cattle) is the most effective. It is a liquid, so tanks and a spray application system must be added to your baler. The amount to use depends on hay moisture. With 20-25% moisture, use .5% propionic acid by weight. For 25-30%, use 1%. So for every 100 pounds of hay at 20-25% moisture, use a half pound of propionic acid. If moisture is above 30% in the hay preservatives become ineffective. Propionic acid is corrosive and can damage machinery. There are other preservatives available but most have not been sufficiently tested.

Maturity of the crop and the type of crop you're making hay with will also affect drying time. Winter forages like ryegrass and clovers have considerably more moisture. It is not uncommon to require 5-7 days of drying time to cure these hays properly. Bermudagrass or bahiagrass have less moisture so at the same temperature and humidity they would cure faster. As plants mature, moisture content decreases. So under similar conditions mature plants will cure faster than younger plants.

Getting hay to dry without getting rained on is tough with the frequency of rainfall in our area. However, if we use proper management we can improve our chances considerably.

MASTER CATTLE PRODUCER:

We will be offering the Master Cattle Producer Course again this year. It is a series of 10 classes that will be offered starting August 22, 2011 and conclude October 31st. It will be every Monday evening during this time expect for Labor Day. Each class will last about three hours, starting at 6:00 p.m. A meal will be served at each meeting. The cost is \$100.00 per person to cover meals, teaching materials and a metallic sign for all graduates.

Subjects included in the course are:

- Nutrition
- Pasture Management
- Breeding and Genetics
- Reproduction
- Herd Health
- Cattle Handling
- End Product
- Record Keeping
- Marketing

In addition, the Environmental Stewardship portion of the Master Farmer course and Beef Quality Assurance class are required for graduation.

If you are interested in this course please fill out the enclosed form and return it along with a check made payable to the Vermilion Parish Cattlemen's Association by August 5th.

HORSE SLAUGHTER RULES EXAMINED:

At first glance most horse enthusiasts and every animal rights activists thought the ban on horse slaughter was a good thing. As usual these groups were blinded by emotion. Any horseman or animal farmer understands the emotion. Horses are easy to get attached, too. But the logic of animal use by humans points to an end of that usefulness. Banning the most useful, efficient and humane ending is illogical. Experts on the horse industry warned Congress that a ban on humane horse slaughter would be bad for the nation's horses. A new Government Accountability Office (GAO) report confirms that horses are suffering as a result of the ban. Horse values have dropped to the point that cost of transportation to markets represents the entire value of the horse. As a result, cases of horse neglect, abuse and abandonment have increased dramatically. In addition, horse slaughter hasn't stopped, it's just moved to Canada and Mexico. We haven't ended horse slaughter we've just made our horses travel farther to be slaughtered. In 2006, the year before the ban, we slaughtered 105 thousand horses in the U.S. In 2010, we exported 137 thousand horses for slaughter.

It seems that the proponents of the slaughter ban's next move is to regulate horse transportation. They continue to deny the need for a useful end to the human-horse relationship. And thereby they will encourage inhumane treatment of our horse population. It may be time to re-contact our Congressional delegation in light of this study.

FEEDER CATTLE MARKETING IS REALLY FORAGE MARKETING:

Derrell S. Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

Whether it's a cow-calf producer selling weaned calves or retaining calves through a stocker or backgrounding program; or a stocker producer adding weight to lightweight calves, the market value of feeder cattle at various weights reflects the value of forage used in the production of feeder cattle. These economic

signals are contained in the level of feeder cattle prices and the price relationships between different weights of feeder cattle. Feeder cattle producers are really in the forage business more than in the cattle business.

In most markets, relative prices provide incentives to increase or decrease production. Cattle production has the additional complexity of considerable flexibility in production systems. Cattle can be produced using relatively more or less forage. Thus, cattle markets also must provide incentives for the cattle industry to utilize the best production systems for different market situations. Sometimes the market emphasizes weaned calf production and at other times the market emphasizes heavy feeder cattle production on forage.

Lessons from history can be instructive. 2006 was a good example of a market emphasizing calf production. The major market conditions at that time were cyclically low cattle numbers and cheap corn. The result was high calf prices, similar to current levels, but a sharp decline in prices for heavy feeder cattle. The price of a heavy feeder was less than 80 percent of the price of a calf. Thus, the value of forage marketed through weaned calves was high but the value of stocker or backgrounding gain was relatively low. With cheap corn and low cattle numbers, the market was encouraging cattle to move into feedlots quicker and lighter and the potential for stocker based gains was limited.

The year 1996 was a good example of the other extreme. Cyclically large cattle numbers and drought-induced, high corn prices resulted in low feeder cattle price levels, thus discouraging calf production, but relatively high value of stocker gain that encouraged more forage based feeder production to stretch limited corn supplies. The price of a heavy feeder was approaching 90 percent of the price of the calf price. In this situation, the returns to cow-calf production were low but the returns to stocker or backgrounding gains were relatively high. The value of forage was higher when marketed through fewer, but heavier, feeder cattle.

The current market environment can be characterized by low cattle numbers and high corn prices. Such a combination of factors is unprecedented in the history of the modern cattle industry. On the one hand, low cattle numbers implies market incentives to increase cow-calf production...thus high calf prices. On the other hand, high corn prices implies incentives to produce more heavy feeders and reduce corn usage in the feedlot...thus heavy feeder prices that are high relative to calf prices. In Oklahoma last week, the price of a 477 pound, Medium/Large, number 1 steer was \$146.06/cwt. and the price of a 769 pound steer was \$142.26/cwt. (KO_LS794, USDA-AMS). The result is increased value of forage for all types of cow-calf and stocker production. **Cow-calf and stocker producers have more flexibility in production and marketing than at any time in many years.** The value of weaned calves is high so a cow-calf focus on maximum cow numbers is consistent with market signals. However, the value of stocker gain is also high so a cow-calf producer interested in retaining ownership of calves through a backgrounding program has considerable potential as well. Stocker producers have considerable flexibility to utilize a wide range of beginning weights, and to hold cattle to heavy weights.

The current situation is unique. Feeder cattle producers don't have to spend a lot of effort to figure out what the market wants you to do. The market wants more of anything using forage. So how do producers decide what to do? Profitability will be determined by cost relative to price for all sizes of feeder cattle. The most profitable choice for each producer will depend on quantity and quality of available resources, management and labor limitations, purchased input needs, and other cost considerations. The main job of producers is to decide how to allocate the resources you control among production alternatives and the biggest resource for most feeder cattle producers is forage. Ask yourself which feasible (for you) production system helps you market your forage to the highest value. It's a good time to be in the forage business.

MARKET UPDATE:

Last week, fed cattle traded about \$3/cwt higher on a live weight basis and \$5-6/cwt higher on a dressed basis across the 5-Area market. Choice boxed beef prices were supportive to the fed cattle market, averaging \$0.81/cwt higher for the week. The Choice-Select spread narrowed slightly to \$5.38/cwt. Yearling steer prices were stronger last week, with average prices in Nebraska and Oklahoma about \$5/cwt and \$3/cwt higher, respectively. Calf prices were steady in Nebraska to almost \$7/cwt higher in Oklahoma. The higher feeder cattle market found its support from the higher fed cattle market, not the corn market. Through Thursday last week, corn posted a \$0.33/bu increase in Omaha, NE. Dried distillers grain prices were almost \$5/ton lower though, while wet distillers grain prices fell by a little more than \$1/ton.

From the Livestock Marketing Information Center, In the Cattle Markets, Darrell R. Mark, Livestock Marketing Specialist, University of Nebraska

Sincerely,

Andrew Granger
County Agent
Vermilion Parish

It is the policy of the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service that no person shall be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, or disability.



Louisiana Master Cattle Producer Program

Registration Form

(Please Print Legibly)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City/Town: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Parish of Residence: _____ Area Code & Phone No.: _____

Parish of Cattle Operation if different from Residence: _____

E-mail address: _____

The following requirements must be completed in the next two years to become a

Master Cattle Producer :

- 1) Environmental Stewardship (Master Farmer) - 8 hours
- 2) Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) certification-presented by Louisiana Cattlemen's Association (LCA).
- 3) Completion of the following three hour lectures:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| -Animal Handling | -Nutrition |
| -Reproduction | -Animal Breeding and Selection |
| -Pasture Management I | -Pasture Management II |
| -Financial Planning I | -Financial Planning II |
| -Animal Health | -End Product |

The cost of Master Cattle Producer certification is \$100.00. Please make checks out to: Vermilion Parish Cattlemen's Association and mail to:

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