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Pasture to Market

Providing beef cattle industry information for Louisiana cattle producers
March—April 2016

Benefits to a Controlled Breeding Season—When you think of a breeding season, you think of the time that you turn the bull out to the time you remove the bull from your herd. Now, if you never pull your bulls away from your cows do you consider that a "controlled breeding season"?

In most cases now, cattle sales do not make up the bulk of a families household income. And because of that, certain management strategies do not always make sense for every producer. In the case of a controlled breeding season, there is no "ideal" breeding season length. There are suggestions on how long a breeding season should be, with the most common being 60 to 120 days. But as long as you understand the benefits to a controlled breeding season and can utilize those benefits above and beyond what you are currently doing, then you are making a difference in your operation.

Marketing. If you do not remove bulls from the cowherd at some point during the breeding season, you end up with a calving season that does not end. This is extremely detrimental to the true value of your calves realized through marketing. By limiting the exposure that a bull has with your cows, you can dictate calving at a more ideal time of year that suits you, the producer, and the markets. By shortening the breeding season, you create more uniform lots of calves for marketing.

Timing. Timing and the length of your breeding season can play a big role on how you manage the body condition of those cows. It is critical that your cows calve in good body condition in order for them to have a short postpartum recovery period so that a majority of them are cycling before the breeding season. Optimum body condition score at calving and at breeding should be somewhere between a 5 and 6. In the southeast, our spring calving cows typically go into the breeding season sometime in April/May, when there is a controlled breeding season. During this time there is an abundance of cool-season forages that are typically of higher quality than our warm-season forages and cattle can recover from calving and reach a minimum body condition score of 5 at breeding. However, if you have a longer breeding season and it overlaps with hay feeding, typically supplementation is required because most of our warm-season grass hay does not meet the nutrient requirements for a lactating cow. Thus, your cost of production goes up.

Yearly Cycle. The average gestation length of a cow is approximately 283 days. So for a cow to become pregnant and calve on a yearly basis she will need to become pregnant within 90 days of calving. If you have a 120 day calving season, you will have some cows calving at the same time that you start the breeding season. By the time she starts cycling, you may be 60 to 90 days into your breeding season, hoping you get her bred on her first heat. If she takes 3 heats to get bred, then that cow becomes pregnant 100 to 120 days or more into your breeding season. That cow is now on a schedule to calve every 13 months and will likely calve later year after year. A 60-day breeding season is very doable. After the last calf is born, all cows will have had at least 30 days to recover before the breeding season. Therefore, a higher percentage of cows have an opportunity to become pregnant at the start of the breeding season! And always remember, tools such as estrous synchronization and AI allow you to get a majority of your cows a chance to get bred on the first day of the breeding season, allowing 1 extra opportunity for them to conceive early on.

Planning. In order to have a controlled breeding season, you have to plan. Planning helps you set goals such as when you want to start and end the breeding season. For example, if you currently have a 150-day breeding season and want to shorten it, shorten the number of days the bulls are with the cows on the beginning and end of the breeding season. For example, if currently your 150-day breeding season begins March 1st and ends July 31st, then begin by turning your bulls out March 15th and then pull your bulls on July 15th, and reduce you breeding season by 30 days each year until you reach your desired length of time. This can be done many different ways and it doesn't have to be 30 days each year. You can start off with shortening it just 15 or 20 days each year. As long as you work to shorten it to your desired length each year, you will reach your goals. Oh, and one last thing, don't keep your open cows. Strategic culling of late calving and open cows will assist in reducing the breeding and calving seasons, and improve overall fertility in your herd.—***Ryon S. Walker, LSU AgCenter Hill Farm Research Station***

Using young bulls in multi-sire pastures and cow-to-bull ratios—With spring bull sales in full swing, cow calf operators are assessing their bull batteries and making needed purchases. Producers often ask about the use of young bulls in the same breeding pasture with older, larger bulls. In most instances, this is a practice that should be discouraged if at all possible. Young bulls will normally lose the battle of deciding who is the dominant individual in the breeding pasture. Ranchers report that in some cases young bulls that have been severely "whipped" are less aggressive breeders after that incident. Australian data on multi-sire pastures have shown that some young bulls gain a dominant role as they mature and breed a large percentage of the cows. Other bulls will not gain that dominant status, and only breed a very small percentage of the cows in a multi-sire pasture for the remainder of his stay at the ranch. The best solution is to always place young bulls with young bulls and mature bulls with mature bulls in the breeding pasture.

In some situations, the rancher may choose to use the mature bulls in the first two-thirds of the breeding season, and then rotate in the young bulls. This allows the young bulls to gain one to two months of additional age and sexual maturity. In addition the young bulls should have considerably fewer cows in heat at the end of the breeding season as the mature bulls will have bred the bulk of the cows or heifers. The young bulls will be in the breeding season only a few weeks and should not be as "run down" or in poor body condition at the conclusion of the breeding season.

Also a commonly asked question is: "How many cows should be mated to young bulls?" The old rule of thumb is to place the young bull with about as many cows as his age in months. Therefore the true "yearling" would only be exposed to 12 or 13 females. If he is a year and a half old (18 months), then he should be able to breed 15 – 18 cows. By the time the bull is two years of age, he should be able to breed 24 or 25 cows. Realize that tremendous variability exists between bulls. Some are capable of breeding many more cows than what is suggested here. AND sadly enough, a few bulls will fail when mated to a very few cows. Hopefully, a breeding soundness exam and close observation during the first part of the breeding season will identify those potential failures. ***—Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist***

Private Pesticide Applicator License Holders: Don't forget to check the expiration date on your license! If it will be expiring March 31,2016, check with your local LSU AgCenter office to find a recertification session near you!

Acadiana Beef Cattle Producers Field Day -

Date: Saturday, March 19, 2016
Time: 8:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Place: Iberia Research Station, Jeanerette

Registration starts at 8:00 a.m.

Indoor Program

- Veterinary Feed Directive-What You Need to Know -Dr. Christine Navarre
- Use of Apps in Agriculture -Dr. Stuart Gauthier
- Understanding Soil Analysis Results -Mr. Blair Hebert
- Master Farmer Program -Mr. Allen Hogan

Outdoor Program

- Proper Vaccination and Deworming Practices –Mr. Andrew Granger, Mr. Stan Dutile & Dr. Stuart Gauthier
- Fertilization of Hay Meadows – Dr. Ed Twidwell
- Use of Prowl H2O in Hay Meadows – Dr. Ron Strahan
- Stocking Rate/Supplementation of Stockers – Dr. Guillermo Scaglia
- Master Cattleman Graduation Ceremony – Mr. Stan Dutile and Mr. Andrew Granger

Door Prizes and Lunch Provided

Sponsors: LSU AgCenter, LFGC & LCA

Spot Treating Thistles in Winter Pastures Containing Clover—Thistles like the big bull thistles we see in pastures in Louisiana are biennials. Biennials live for two years and reproduce only by seed. After germination, they form a prostrate rosette ranging from 4 to 18 inches in diameter before becoming dormant in the summer and emerge again in the fall. Exposure to cold winter temperatures is necessary to trigger these thistles to flower the second year after sending up a flower stalk (called bolting). Each plant can send up several stalks and produce numerous flower heads, each with viable seeds. After flowering, biennial thistles die in the second year. The only way to cut down on thistle populations is to destroy the plants before seed production occurs. Thistles are not hard to control with the right herbicides like Grazon Next, Grazon P+D, and Chaparral. The problem is that these herbicides decimate clover stands. The difficulty is controlling thistle without destroying stands of clover.

Spot treating thistles with inexpensive herbicides like glyphosate or 2,4-D could be one of the most effective ways to selectively control thistle stands with minimal damage to clover stands. In order to test the efficacy of these two herbicides on thistles, a field study was conducted on November 11, 2015 to evaluate spot treatments of 2% volume per volume solutions (2.5 oz. of herbicide/1 gallon of water) of glyphosate or 2,4-D. Plants were treated prior to bolting. Thistle diameters ranged from 15 to 35" at the time of treatment. The treatments were replicated 10 times and included an unsprayed check. See table below.

Herbicide	Rate	% Thistle control 3 weeks after treatment	% Thistle control 6 weeks after treatment
Glyphosate	2% v/v solution	100	100
2,4-D	2% v/v solution	60	100

Results—Spot glyphosate applications provided 100% thistle control at both the 3 and 6 weeks after treatment data collection period. As expected, glyphosate caused localized damage to the treated bahiagrass/clover. Thistles treated with 2,4-D provided only 60% control 3 weeks after treatment. However, by 6 weeks after treatment, all thistles treated with 2,4-D were killed. Spot 2,4-D treatments were less damaging to the bahiagrass/clover.—***Ron Strahan, LSU AgCenter***

Beef Production, Exports Projected to be Higher—The United States Department of Agriculture's Office of the Chief Economist held its annual Outlook Forum last week. Mr. Shayle D. Shagam, a Livestock Analyst for the World Agricultural Outlook Board presented his projections for 2016. Not surprisingly, beef production is projected to be 3.8% higher in 2016 with 24.58 billion pounds. Production for competing proteins are also projected to be higher, with pork expected to be 2.2% higher while broiler production is expected to be 2.5% higher in 2016. All indications point toward 2016 having the first year-over year increase in beef production since 2008-2009. Among the largest drivers of the increase in beef production is the beef herd expansion that has been discussed for several years, but has only materialized within the last year. January 2015 beef cow numbers saw their first increase in over 10 years. The calf crop in 2015 also marked the first year-over year increase in more than 10 years. Many of those calves are either already on feed or will be entering the feedlots soon and will likely be included in the year's beef supply numbers.

Lower feed costs are expected to be a major driver of continued herd expansion as well as increased beef production. Increased corn production is expected to outpace demand for corn, further building upon already large ending stocks. The increased supply of corn will likely bring corn prices down even more in 2016 to a projected $3.45/bu, down $0.15/bu from last year's price. Soybean production is projected to be 3% lower than a year ago, but despite lower production, prices are still projected to be about $0.30/bu lower than a year ago. Lower soybean prices should translate into lower soybean meal prices for cattle feeders. The lower feed prices provide feedlots with an incentive to feed cattle for a longer period of time. When combined with the continued placement of heavier cattle, carcass weights are also expected to increase in 2016.

Cattle prices are expected to be lower in 2016. Feeder steer prices are projected to range from $176 to $185/cwt, down from $203 average in 2015 but more in line with current prices; which suggests an expectation of a sideways market in 2016. The 5-area fed steer price is forecast to fall between $133 and $142/cwt, also lower than a year ago but slightly higher than what prices were a week ago. The lower cattle prices are expected to contribute to increased beef exports in 2016. Mr. Shagam also points out that Australia will likely have sharply lower exports as a result of their herd-rebuilding efforts. That should open additional doors for U.S. beef exports, however exports could also be held back some by a strong dollar.—***LMIC, In the Cattle Markets; March 1, 2016***

Cattle market "business as usual"? Feeder and fed cattle prices are currently at roughly the same levels as in late 2013. In the intervening 26 or so months, cattle markets have been on a rollercoaster that took cattle prices higher, faster than ever imagined, followed by a sharp correction in late 2015 that was more abrupt and severe than anyone could anticipate. This has left cattle producers cautious and somewhat hesitant about what to expect going forward. One of the challenges through this period has been the fact that many of the cattle and meat market indicators, patterns and relationships have behaved very unusually leaving producers and analysts at a loss to understand and anticipate market movements.

Recently, however, there are number of indications cattle markets may be returning to somewhat more typical behavior. After the worst year ever in 2015, feedlot margins are moving back to levels will lead to positive returns for feedlots. This process is not complete and will likely continue through the next few months. Within feeder cattle markets, the margins or value of gain across weights just recently has adjusted to reflect feedlot cost of gain. The value of gain calculates to the $0.70 - $0.80/pound range in the past couple of weeks. This suggests that feedlots are pricing feeder cattle in a manner that reflects equilibrium across weights. This is the first time in many months that the value of gain in feeder prices is consistent with broader cattle market conditions.

On a very different note, wholesale beef markets appear to returning to patterns not seen for many months. So far in 2016, middle meats are advancing or holding value relative to weaker end meats. This long term tendency for middle meats to be the strongest part of carcass value has been reversed much of the time in recent years, going all the way back to the recession in 2009. Retail beef prices peaked in mid-2015 and are working lower as beef production begins to grow. Similarly, the ratio of retail beef prices to pork and poultry prices pushed to unprecedented levels over the past two years and has now peaked an begins adjusting back to more typical levels. The retail meat price ratios have been an impressive indication of strong beef demand but the fact that the retail price ratios are returning to more typical levels is an indication of more relative stability in meat markets.

Finally, perhaps the most obvious sign of relative stability is the fact that feeder and fed cattle and beef markets are exhibiting mostly seasonal behavior so far in 2016. Dramatic price trends, both up and down over the past couple years have overshadowed seasonal market tendencies. Though cattle and beef prices are expected to trend lower over the coming months, that trend will not be pronounced and markets are expected to behave much more seasonally.

While cattle and beef markets will no doubt continue to experience volatility, especially related to external macroeconomic and global uncertainty, it is encouraging that many of the internal market indicators are swinging back to more typical levels. This indicates a degree of relative stability in cattle and beef markets that has not been there in recent months—***Derrell S. Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist***

Improved Outlook for Cattle Feeding Returns—Estimated cattle feeding returns for steers sold in January remained mired deep in red ink. However, losses were dramatically less than during late 2015. In fact, red ink easily declined by $200.00 per steer between closeouts in January versus just one month earlier in December. In the era of commercial High Plain cattle feeding, calendar year 2014 was by most accounts the second best year ever in terms of cattle feeding profitability and 2015 was by all accounts the worst. This year (2016) looks to be rather typical, probably not one of the best for cattle feeders, but still over the next few months many pens of cattle at well managed feedlots should turn a profit.

Cattle markets are setting-up in some important ways to be much different than a year ago. Most importantly, feeder animal prices (e.g. 700-to 800-pound steers) have returned to much more normal price levels relative to those of fed animals. In the Southern Plains that market premium for last week was about $24.00 per cwt/ compared to over $51.00 a year ago. The peak weekly premium last year was over $82.00 per cwt. Last year the huge cost of feeder animals could not be overcome by rather inexpensive feedstuffs.

From a cattle feeder perspective, the cost of that incoming feeder animal is important in their decision-making. The very high cost of cattle to go on-feed and replace traditionally market ready animals was a major contributor to the slow marketing rate in 2015 which was a driver of the cattle price collapse last fall. Of course, other factors also facilitated that abrupt price decline. In recent months, incentives to delay marketing of finished cattle and create associated problems have dissipated significantly.

Using recent prices of 700-to 800-pound steers in the Southern Plains, the LMIC estimated breakeven sale price for cattle to be sold in coming months are below $130.00 per cwt., the lowest since animals sold in October 2014. Based on those breakeven levels, most fed animals to be sold in April and May are projected to turn a profit. Even though feeding returns will dramatically improve, the lingering impacts of 2015's red ink will overhang the market throughout this year and keep a cap on calf and yearling prices.—***LMIC, Livestock Monitor; February 22, 2016***

March—April Beef Cattle Management Tips:

Below are some all-purpose management tips in an abbreviated format that cattle producers should consider for the months indicated. "General" management tips are intended to fit all situations while the "spring calving - January, February, March" and "fall calving - October, November, December" tips are for those specific calving programs. Some producers are likely aware of each tip and have incorporated many into their management programs. Other producers may find these tips to be suggestions to consider in their future management. Regardless, every producer will have to consider how a specific tip might be adapted to fit their individual situation, and some modification of the times provided will be expected. Severe environmental conditions will also dictate some modification of the tips depending on the severity in each location. A more detailed description of management opportunities can be found in numerous AgCenter publications available in the local parish extension office or on the web. Additional scheduling and management details in a worksheet format are available on-line from the LSU AgCenter in the Monthly Beef Cattle Management Calendar & Workbook at:

http://text.lsuagcenter.com/en/crops_livestock/livestock/beef_cattle/production_management/Workbook.

Month	Management	Tip
March	general	1. Continue feeding high magnesium supplement to cows on winter grazing
		2. Monitor winter pasture stubble height; keep about 4"
	spring calving	1. For a January 10 - March 30 calving season, bulls need to go in April 1 - June 20. Make sure bulls are in good condition and conduct breeding soundness exams
		2. Cows need to be in moderate to good condition to rebreed early. You may need to start feeding your best hay and put them on your best grazing now. Supplement as needed according to forage test
		3. Start breeding heifers about a month before the cow herd
	fall calving	1. Remove bulls March 23rd to end calving season about December 31st
		2. Keep bulls in small pastures with strong fences. Feed bulls enough to keep them in good condition for next year's breeding season
		3. Spot check cows to see if most are bred. By now, there should be little activity
		4. Vaccinate for clostridial disease, castrate and dehorn late calves or those missed in early working
April	general	1. Keep a close watch on pasture conditions. Continue supplemental feeding until grass is plentiful
		2. Fertilize permanent pastures according to soil test
		3. Start watching for flies. Order fly control products to be ready when treatment warrants. Consider the type tags or sprays used last year. Change from organophosphate to pyrethroid or vise versa
		4. Use all outside stores of hay; clean out hay storage areas for new hay
		1. For calving to begin around January 10th, bulls need to be put in with cows on April 1st
		2. Check condition of bulls during the breeding season. Provide supplemental feed if needed
		3. Prepare to remove bulls from cow herd after a 45-60 day breeding season. Spot check for breeding activity
		4. Cows need to be in moderate to good condition to rebreed. Provide supplemental feed if spring pastures are slow to emerge from dormancy
		1. To precondition for marketing, calves should be vaccinated for respiratory diseases 45 days prior to shipment. Consult with your local veterinarian now for product recommendations so these vaccines can be ordered
		2. Pregnancy check 45-60 days after the end of breeding season
		3. Brand or otherwise establish permanent ID's for bred heifers

Northwest Beef & Forage Field Day—The LSU AgCenter's Northwest Beef & Forage Field Day is scheduled for Tuesday, April 26th at the Hill Farm Research Station in Homer. Registration will begin at 8:30 a.m. with presentations beginning at 9:00. Those wishing to attend are asked to pre-register before April 19th by calling Laura at the Hill Farm Research Station at 318-927-2578. Topics and speakers will include:

- **Market Outlook - What's Next**
  - Mr. Stan Beavers, Texas A&M AgriLife
- **Fly Control in Cattle**
  - Dr. Lane Foil, LSU AgCenter
- **Grazing Management—Tall Fescue**
  - Dr. Wink Alison, LSU AgCenter
- **Utilizing Scales in Your Operation**
  - Dr. Ryon Walker, LSU AgCenter
- **Herbicide Demo**
  - Dr. Ron Strahan and Mr. Lee Faulk, LSU AgCenter
- **New Clover Varieties**
  - Dr. Buddy Pitman, LSU AgCenter
- **Stock Dog Demonstration**
  - Mr. Jimmy Walker, Hillsboro, TX

Data Source: USDA-AMS Market News		Week of 2/26/2016	Week of 2/19/2016	Week of 2/27/2015
5-Area Fed Steer	all grades, live weight, $/cwt	$ 133.63	$ 131.56	$ 158.44
	all grades, dressed weight, $/cwt	$ 209.82	$ 205.92	$ 253.56
Boxed Beef	Choice Price, 600-900 lb., $/cwt	$ 216.51	$ 213.84	$ 245.28
	Choice-Select Spread, $/cwt	$ 4.16	$ 4.47	$ 1.80
500-600 lb. Feeder Steer Price	Mississippi statewide market average, M&L #1-2, $/cwt	$ 175.00	$ 172.50	$ 255.00
	Missouri statewide market average, M&L #1, $/cwt	$ 196.15	$ 196.46	$ 267.56
	Oklahoma City market average, M&L #1, $/cwt	$ 188.73	$ 187.73	$ 267.49
Feed Grains	Corn, Kansas City, $/bu	$ 3.81	$ 3.68	$ 3.79
	Corn, Pine Bluff, AR, $/bu			$ 3.89
	DDGS, Eastern Corn Belt, $/ton	$ 141.00	$ 136.00	$ 184.00
	Soybean Meal, Rail, Central IL, $/ton	$ 270.50	$ 272.50	$ 383.60
	Cottonseed Meal, Memphis, $/ton	$ 232.50	$ 240.00	$ 305.00
	Whole Cottonseed, Memphis, $/ton	$ 255.00	$ 257.00	$ 273.00

March—April 2016

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