PASTURE TO MARKET

Providing beef cattle information for producers in Louisiana.
Winter 2025

Dean Lee Research and Extension Center

8105 Tom Bowman Dr.

Alexandria, Louisiana 71302

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News and Reminders from the Editor

Ashley K. Edwards, PhD, Extension Beef Cattle Specialist – LSU AgCenter

Current Management Considerations:

It has been an interesting start to 2025 so far with snow falling through the central and southern parts of the state in January. With that, there were many concerns for the conditions of winter forages. In visiting with many people throughout the state, it seems that pastures seem to be recovering well, especially as we move into "peak" ryegrass season.

Spring calving and workings are also well underway throughout the state. Remember to monitor calves even a few days after birth to ensure they are up and nursing. Also keep any heavy traffic areas, particularly around hay rings, under surveillance for calves getting bogged down in mud.

We have quite a few events scheduled for producers this spring! These are listed at the end of this newsletter. The LSU AgCenter's Beef Cattle webpage has received a small update. Be sure to look at our "Producer Programs" section to see if anything useful will be hosted near you this year. As always, please reach out to me or your local Extension Agent to let us know if we can offer additional content in the form of fact sheets, videos, workshops, etc.

Website link: www.lsuagcenter.com/beefcattle

Forward Planning:

Fertilize winter forages as needed.

Vaccinate fall-born calves and prepare them for weaning.

Plan breeding soundness exams and prepare for spring breeding.

Update records and prepare tax reports.

Why Should I Soil Test Before Fertilizing My Pasture?

Leandro O. Vieira II, PhD, Assistant Professor & Soil Fertility Specialist – LSU AgCenter

As soon as the weather starts warming up again, we will be thinking about applying some kind of fertilizer to our pastures. But why should we test our soil beforehand? Think of a soil test as a routine medical exam for your pasture. The soil test can prevent a series of problems, such as a decline in forage growth, quality and persistence.

But first of all, what is soil test? A soil test involves a series of analyses to measure soil acidity (pH) and nutrient availability to plants. At the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center (LSU AgCenter) Soil Testing Lab, the basic test provides readings for pH and plant availability concentrations of phosphorus, potassium, calcium, magnesium, sodium, sulfur, copper, and zinc. Nitrogen recommendations are based on forage type and management. While sodium is not a nutrient for plants, high levels can challenge forage growth.
The most important value in a soil test report is pH. A pH below 7.0 indicates acidity, while a pH above 7.0 indicates alkalinity. Most forages grow best in slightly acidic soils with a pH between 5.5 and 6.5 (Figure 1). However, some forages may require pH ranges outside the 5.5-6.5 to properly grow. Soil pH is crucial because it will dictate the plant availability of elements in the soil. Among those elements are the nutrients, elements that the plants cannot properly function without it, and toxic elements that can impair plant growth, such as aluminum.

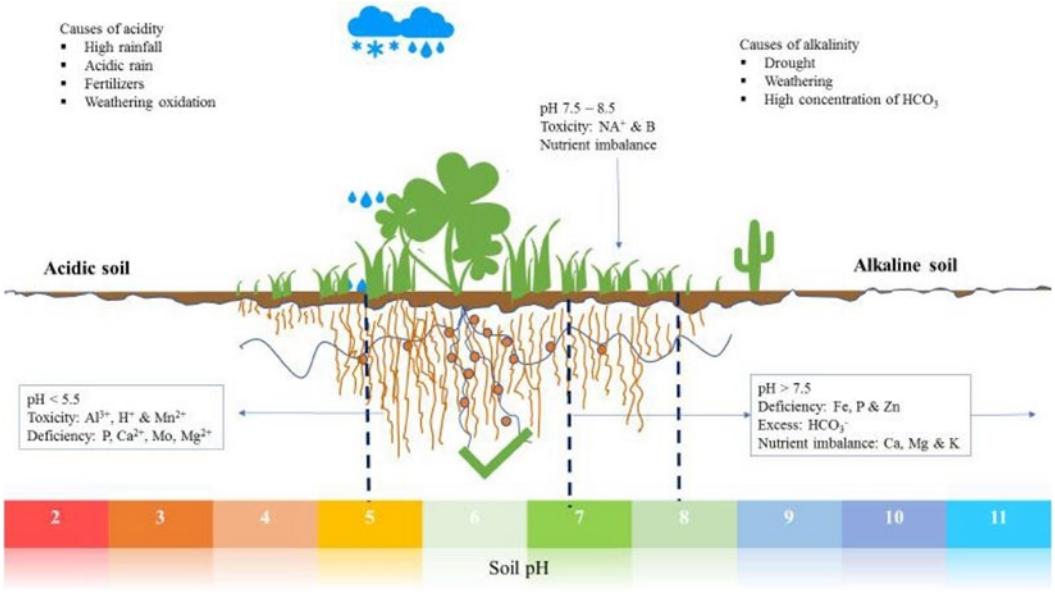

Figure 1. Soil pH and its influence on forage growth.
Source: Msimbira, L.A., & Smith, D.L. 2020. The roles of plant growth promoting microbes in enhancing plant tolerance to acidity and alkalinity stresses. Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems, 4: 1-14. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2020.00106

Soils with a pH below the recommended range will strongly hold plant macronutrients, reducing its availability (Figure 2). Macronutrients are nutrients that are needed in large quantities by plants: nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, magnesium and sulfur. Conversely, low pH increases the availability of most micronutrients, which can lead to toxicity. Micronutrients are nutrients that are needed in lower amounts by

plants: zinc, boron, copper, manganese, iron, molybdenum, nickel and chloride. Since they are needed in small amounts by plants, there is a fine line between sufficiency and toxicity.

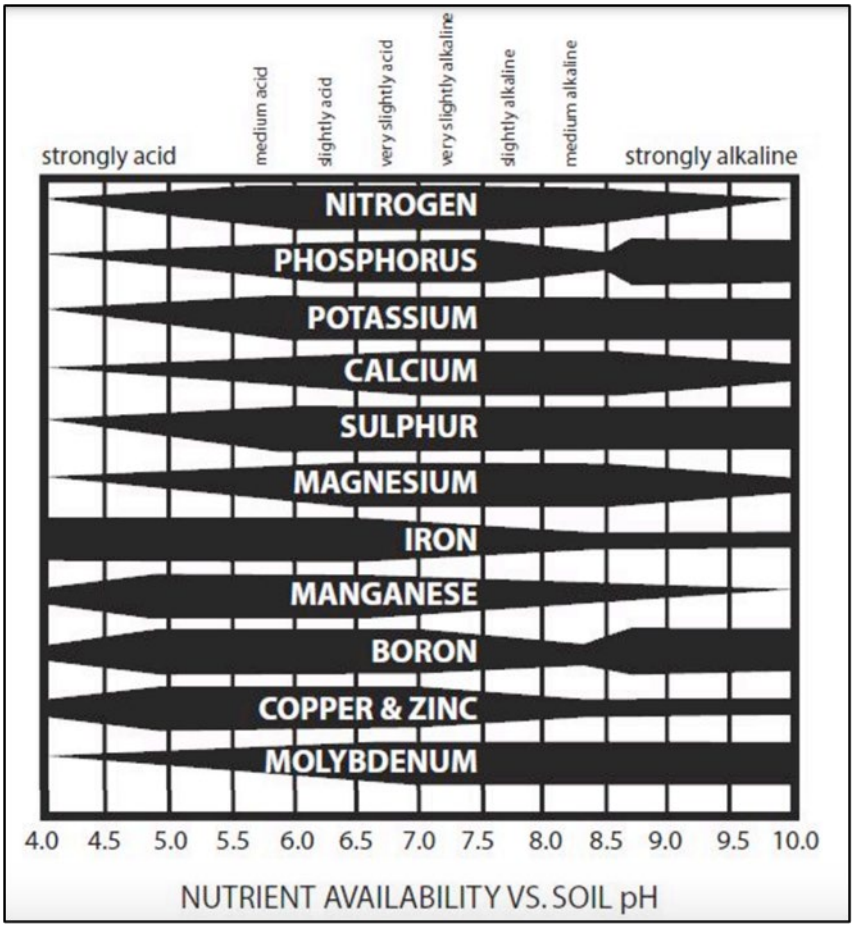

Figure 2. Nutrient availability as affected by soil pH.
Source: Reitsma, Clay, & Carlson (2011). Soil Fertility. In book: Alternative Practices for Agronomic Nutrient and Pest Management in South Dakota. South Dakota State University, College of Agriculture and Biological Sciences. p. 9-35.

On the other hand, soils with a pH above the recommended for the forage of interest will hold plant micronutrients and reduce its availability (Figure 2). This can potentially cause micronutrient deficiency. However, a high pH will not necessarily result in higher availability of macronutrients. Some macronutrients, such as phosphorus and nitrogen, will also have their availability reduced on high pH soils. Long story short, an ideal pH for the forage of interest will result in a maximized macro and micronutrient availability. This will directly impact in the growth, development and persistence of the desired forages. Additionally, it will reduce the amount of nutrients that need to be applied resulting in lower expenses for fertilizers.

After adjusting soil pH, the next step is to address specific nutrient levels. Soil test reports classify nutrient levels as very low, low, medium, high, or very high. High levels typically mean no additional fertilizer is needed, while low levels indicate a need for supplementation.

In summary, the soil test is the best way to access possible nutrient deficiencies and excessive acidity or alkalinity. In addition, resources can be spent elsewhere in case less fertilizer is needed. The LSU AgCenter Soil

Testing Lab, located at 125 M.B. Sturgis Hall on the main campus in Baton Rouge, provides soil analyses and interpretation for a small fee: (https://www.lsuagcenter.com/portals/our_offices/departments/spess/servicelabs/soil_testing_lab). Take advantage of soil testing to ensure your forages thrive.

If you have any questions regarding replacement heifer development or content in this article, please reach out to Dr. Vieira at lvieira@agcenter.lsu.edu.

Winter Pasture Expectations

Ed Twidwell, PhD, Extension Forage Specialist – LSU AgCenter

Winter pastures are an important part of life for most cattle, sheep, horse and dairy producers in Louisiana. Their seasonal distribution to animal nourishment and productivity is widely recognized. They are also important because of the expense they cause to producers and because they are not one-hundred percent reliable. Too often, producers remark to me that their winter pasture is just not providing the grazing they expected. This article points out some of the more common reasons for poor performance in the hope it will help you recognize and prevent poor performance in future years.

Poor performance in winter pastures can be caused by many problems that generally manifest themselves through either poor stands or poor growth of established stands or a combination of the two. Poor stands can be due to several causes.

One of the most fundamental causes is poor seed quality. Seed with poor germination or low seedling vigor are a poor investment, regardless of the price. Planting only seed from a bag showing high germination in a recent test, a high purity, and certified to a variety should help prevent seed problems. One of the most common causes of poor stands is poor planting. Inadequate seedbed preparation, failure to cover seed, planting too deep, and planting outside of the recommended dates are all poor planting practices. Seed of wheat or oats and seed of clovers should not be planted at the same depth for instance. If clovers are planted 1 to 2 inches deep as is desired for wheat or oats, few of the clover seeds are likely to produce seedlings. On the other hand, if wheat and oats are covered with only ¼ inch of soil as is ideal for clovers, the small grains are likely to fail unless frequent showers keep the soil moisture at an ideal level for two weeks or longer. Ryegrass and tall fescue are intermediate between clovers and small grains in the needed amount of soil coverage. Coverage of ½ to 1 inch is optimum for these grasses. Recommended planting dates for cool-season pastures are late-September to mid-October if these crops are being planted into prepared seedbeds. Planting during these times helps provide a long period of suitable soil temperatures and minimum weed competition.

Planting into sod requires that planting be delayed to minimize competition to the seedlings from the sod. Mid-to-late October planting of grasses and clovers is more suitable for planting into sod. Of course, the weather in any one year can be different from the average so there is always some risk of unsuitable weather for stand establishment. Drought, excessive rainfall, and low soil temperatures during and immediately following planting can lead to poor stands. Published research results from Texas showed the devastating effects of high temperatures on several clover varieties. Some varieties that had over 95% germination at day/night temperatures of 68/50 degrees had less than 20% germination at day/night temperatures of 95/78 degrees.

Poor seedling growth after establishment is frequently due to inadequate fertilization and liming or unfavorable weather. Soil testing followed by application of the needed lime before planting or the needed P and K either before or at planting can help insure that pastures grow well. Nitrogen of course can be applied after the crop has emerged. It is very necessary for good growth of grasses and many ryegrass pastures perform poorly due to inadequate N application through the fall and winter months. A second cause of poor seedling growth in Louisiana is excessive water in some fields. Saturated or even submerged soils are often found because of the frequent fall and winter rains. Site selection for planting winter pastures is very important and the likelihood of flooding should be kept in mind.

Finally, overgrazing is too often the cause of poor pasture growth during the winter. Seedlings grazed below a height of about 3 inches are likely to recover slowly. Cold weather can further slow the growth. Because of this, it is wise to control grazing to keep ryegrass, small grains, and /or clovers at a height of 3 inches or taller during the winter. They can be grazed shorter to a height of 2 to 3 inches during the spring when growing conditions are more favorable. Conditions mentioned in this article are not the only factors that can contribute to poor pasture growth. If you are experiencing pasture growth problems, check with your county agent. They may know of local problems that you need to consider.

If you have any questions regarding replacement heifer development or content in this article, please reach out to Dr. Twidwell at etwidwell@agcenter.lsu.edu.

Grazing Management and Cattle Performance

Abigail Sartin, Assistant Extension Agent, Livestock and Forages – LSU AgCenter

Lately it seems that the term “rotational grazing” is a hot topic for the livestock industry. Ironically, rotational grazing is a practice that has been around since bison herds roamed the U.S. Great Plains. Although these bison had no one physically moving them from one pasture to another, they employed this strategy. Bison herds would graze the desirable species in one area then migrate to the next. In the meantime, the grasslands that they left behind were allowed ample time to rest and recover until it was grazed again.

The way we define rotational grazing today might vary due to the evolution of grazing practices. The definition of rotational grazing according to the University of Kentucky Extension is dividing a pasture into smaller paddocks which allows livestock to be moved from one paddock to another. To me, this can be considered a form of rotational grazing, but more specifically it’s called “strip grazing.” To encompass all the practices that might fall under the realm of what we might call rotational grazing would merit its own article. One take home message for today is that all practices that fall under this realm share a common denominator: rest. Allowing pastures ample time to rest after being grazed is a key factor in effective grazing management.

There is a fine line to be considered in forage-based livestock systems, and that line encompasses finding the balance between appropriate utilization and either under grazing or overgrazing. Utilization refers to how efficiently animals use available forage over a certain period. To “use” forage might mean different things depending on the production setting. For a cow-calf producer, utilization might look different for lactating cows and growing calves. For a lactating cow, the production response of the cow using forage is pounds of milk produced; for a growing calf, it’s more likely to be average daily gain (ADG).

This is why it's important to consider your individual goals. Look at what classes of livestock you're feeding and allocate forage resources to meet these goals. Stockpiled and stored forage may not be properly utilized for lactating cows. There's often not enough energy or protein in these dormant and stored forages to support the added energy associated with lactation. On the other hand, dry cows have lower requirements and can make greater use of lower quality forages. Understanding this dynamic is helpful for orchestrating a grazing management plan.

Another thing to consider when it comes to rotational grazing is what types of forages you are planning to graze. Annual forages such as ryegrass can withstand more grazing pressure than perennial species. If we think about the goals of these forage species, an annual plant's goal is to accumulate growth over a target season. For ryegrass, a commonly utilized species in the Gulf Coast region, this season is from roughly December to March. The root systems of these annual forages are not as complex when compared to our perennial species. That is because they are designed to be planted each year. In my mind, it makes sense to utilize these species as much as possible. Ryegrass is most vulnerable in its early stages, so it's important not to overgraze this forage early in the season. This means refraining from grazing until it becomes well established and reaches a height of about 8-10 inches. Then, it can be grazed until it's about 2-3 inches tall. This ensures that the root system is not damaged and allows the ryegrass to regrow more quickly. As the season goes on and ryegrass starts to grow more rapidly, you may begin grazing at 4-6 inches to ensure that the forage is not maturing and becoming less palatable to cattle.

Perennial forages, however, are designed to persist. Common perennial species for this region include Bahia and Bermuda grass. These are the species that we depend on year after year, so we must take care of them and ensure we are finding the balance between proper utilization and overgrazing. If we consistently overgraze these species, they are less persistent each year. But what is overgrazing and how do we avoid it in these species? The growth point for perennial forages is typically higher on the stem compared to annual forages, usually anywhere from 6-8 inches off the ground. Grazing at or below that point affects the plant's ability to rebound. Keep this in mind when it comes to turning cattle out on summer pastures. To ensure adequate stands for years to come, consider subdividing pastures or rotating to other pastures based off forage height to allowing these perennial forages have a rest period to regrow.

Aside from understanding what rotational grazing is and how to use it to manage your pastures, another important consideration is how it plays out economically. There is much research being conducted to quantify the economics of different rotational grazing methods. Many producers who employ some sort of rotational grazing have claimed that they spend less money on commercial fertilizers because of cattle spreading nitrogen through their urine and manure. Another thing to consider is that through good grazing management practices associated with rotational grazing methods, some undesirable species and weeds may be diminished due to healthier root systems of desirable species. While there is not a lot of quantitative research to show these results, there is flexibility in how you can choose to implement a rotational grazing method on-farm. It may be as simple as rotating more intentionally between existing pastures, or it can be as complex as adding permanent paddocks to pre-existing pastures.

There is some variability associated with rotational grazing due to forage type, stocking density, frequency of moves, and how selective cattle are allowed to be when grazing due to the amount of forage allotted. These are factors that producers are actively able to control. So, if you want to force cattle to be more selective and graze out certain species, you can alter different factors such as how many head are grazing per acre or how long you leave cattle to graze in a certain area. Research shows conflicting results when it comes to the relationship between stocking rate and ADG when grazing vegetative small cereal grains such as annual ryegrass. A study conducted by Roquette et al. in 2023 found that increasing the stocking rate reduced average daily gains when grazing a mix of annual and cereal rye. The stocking rates compared in this study are

shown in table 1. Interestingly, this study also showed no difference in ADG or gain per acre when comparing continuous versus rotational grazing practices. Research in dormant forage settings, such as stockpiled forages, has shown the opposite to be true. In these systems, typically continuous grazing results in higher ADG, likely because cattle can select out higher quality forage. These results are further proof that we must utilize different grazing strategies when it comes to grazing perennial versus annual forage sources.

It's important to understand that previous research has concluded that individual animal gain in terms of weight gain is typically decreased with intensification of the grazing system. This is likely attributed to the fact that cattle are not permitted to be as selective and are consuming forages that may be lesser quality. However, forcing cattle to be less selective results in more effective utilization of the pasture itself. You may also spend less money on chemical treatment of pastures because cattle could be consuming species that are often considered weeds. Depending on your goals, rotational grazing strategies are valuable tools for increasing gain per acre. If individual animal performance is your primary goal, then continuous grazing might be the better option. Regardless of your goals, good grazing management and ample rest time for perennial pastures tend to result in economic return due to a lowered need of commercial fertilizers and chemicals.

	ADG		Gain/acre	
Management Strategy	**lb/d**	**SE**	**lb/d**	**SE**
Stocking rate (animal/acre)†				
Low (12)	2.73a*	0.042	731b*	50.32
Medium (15)	2.29b	0.048	882a	60.97
High (21)	1.63c	0.042	707b	50.32
Stocking Method				
Continuous	2.24	0.040	778	46.26
Rotational	2.20	0.040	770	45.79

†One stocker = 550 lb. bodyweight
* Different letters within columns indicate a difference ($P < 0.01$) between stocking rates

Adapted from Louquette, F. M., K. D. Norman, C. R. Long, and E. Van Santen. 2023. Forage allowance and daily gain relationships on rye-ryegrass pastures at different stocking rates with continuous and rotational stocking. XXV International Grassland Congress (IGC 2023):851–854

Creep Feeding Calves – Is It Worth It?

Joshua Salley, Assistant Extension Agent, Livestock and Forages – LSU AgCenter

Proactive beef cattle producers are always on the watch for means to earn a larger profit when it is time to market their calves. One of these means is the process of creep feeding. Creep feeding provides supplemental feed in the form of forage and/or grain to nursing calves. This can be accomplished with the use of creep feeders or creep gates which allows calves of certain sizes to access the feed or forage while keeping mature cattle out.

Beef cattle producers often utilize creep feeding during times of nutritional stress such as drought conditions or during fall calving seasons when forages may not be readily available. Creep feeding may also be used when calves are born to first-calf heifers to supplement the lower milk supply or when cattle are placed in dry lot conditions. The logic behind creep feeding is quite simple, to improve the weight gain of calves before weaning which should result in heavier weaning weights for the cattle producer. Cow-calf producers are paid on a per-pound basis with many producers selling calves at the time of weaning. Others may choose to wean calves and place them on feed for a specific time and then send the calves to market.

There are multiple forms of creep feeding which include pre-mixed rations, protein supplements in the form of liquid or tubs, and creep grazing planted forages such as ryegrass or oats. Cattle producers should analyze their creep feeding program to compare the cost of their improved weaning weights to the expected increase in the performance of their calves at weaning. Creep feeding has several advantages as well as disadvantages and each cattle operation is different. What works for one producer may not be beneficial to their neighbor.

Before implementing a creep feeding system into their operation, cattle producers should take into consideration how they plan to market their calves. Will they be sold at weaning or will they be pre-conditioned? Will heifers be retained in the herd as replacements? Calves that will be entering a stocker program may benefit from being creep fed before weaning. Creep feeding these calves will get them accustomed to eating grain which will result in a smoother transition during weaning. Research has shown that calves that were creep fed experienced fewer respiratory issues during the preconditioning phase when compared to non-creep fed calves (Stewart, 2017). Calves that have been creep fed will often express an increase in marbling once they have been slaughtered and placed on the rail also. Calves should continue being fed a grain□based diet immediately after weaning and adjusted to a feedlot finishing diet within 28 days after weaning to experience the greatest positive impact on the level of marbling.

Replacement heifers should not be placed on a creep feeding program. Research trials have proven that creep feeding heifers a high-grain diet can result in decreased milk production which will result in lighter weaned calves. In a research trial conducted to determine the effects of creep feeding on reproductive performance and lactation, first-calf heifers that had been creep fed while nursing their dams had a lower ($P<.05$) daily milk yield at 120 d post-partum than those that did not have access to creep feed (Hixon et al., 1982). If heifers are not expected to reach their target weight for breeding, creep feeding may be beneficial. This is often the case for fall-born heifers.

Creep grazing is another form of creep-feeding calves. In a creep grazing program, a designated area of pasture would be prepared and planted, usually with either a warm season annual such as alyceclover or pearl millet, or a cool season annual such as ryegrass. The variety of forages planted would of course depend on the calving season of the operation. Creep gates can be placed along the perimeter fence to allow calves to enter the planted fields while keeping mature cattle out. A single strand of electric fence wire may also be used. When placed approximately 36 to 42 inches above the ground, calves are allowed to walk under while cows cannot. Creep grazing is generally cheaper than creep feeding grain to calves. With high-quality forages, creep grazing can add 10 to 20% gains, however, calves typically do not gain as much fat in a creep grazing system as compared to being on grain which would be beneficial for feeding replacement heifers (Stewart, 2017).

While it may be obvious that creep feeding can be advantageous in adding pounds to pre□weaned calves, the most important topic for cattle producers is whether it is profitable. Cattle producers are often more likely to implement creep feeding during stronger calf markets with the assumption that the potential additional pounds gained from creep feeding will increase their profit margin. This isn't always true. Creep feeding may result in increased economic returns when drought conditions are present with limited amounts of forage or when calves are nursing poor milking cows or heifers. Calves have a genetic limitation on the amount of gain that they can achieve. When nursing heavy milking cows on lush forages, the additional expense of creep feeding may not equate to more profits for the producer. Another misconception is that creep-fed calves will not nurse as much therefore by creep-feeding, some stress is alleviated on the cow. Research trials have proven that calves will continue to consume similar amounts of milk even when being creep fed or with creep grazing.

As previously stated, creep feeding is not always a one size fits all practice. It is a management tool for producers to utilize under the right circumstances. Cattle producers can potentially gain the most from creep

feeding during times of drought when calves are nursing poor milking cows, and when ownership of calves will be retained through slaughter. Fall-born calves may also benefit from being offered creep feed. This management tool can prove to be profitable for many cattle operations when used properly, however, if careful consideration isn't given to the cost of gain, creep feeding may cost producers more than what can be benefited from the practice.

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Upcoming Events

Master Cattleman Programs – Spring 2025
www.lsuagcenter.com/mastercattleman

Northeast Region Master Cattleman Program
- When: Monday, March 3 to Monday, May 5, 2025
- Weekly from 6 to 9 PM on either Monday or Tuesday night.
- Where: LSU AgCenter's Scott Center in Winnsboro
- Contact: Tripp Morgan (tmorgan@agcenter.lsu.edu)

Northwest Region Master Cattleman Program
- When: Monday February 24 to Monday, April 28, 2025
- Weekly from 6 to 9 PM on Monday night.
- Where: Red River Research Station in Bossier City
- Contact: Lee Faulk (afaulk@agcenter.lsu.edu)

Central Region Master Cattleman program
- When: Monday, March 10 to Monday, May 12, 2025
- Weekly from 6 to 9 PM on Monday night.

Where: Dewitt Livestock Facility (Dean Lee Research and Extension Center) in Alexandria.
Contact: Brittany Zaunbrecher (bzaunbrecher@agcenter.lsu.edu) or Tyler Barlow (tbarlow@agcenter.lsu.edu)

Acadiana Master Cattleman Program
When: Monday, March 17 to Monday, May 26, 2025
Weekly from 6 to 9 PM on Monday night.
Where: Vermilion Parish Extension Office in Abbeville.
Contact: Lanie Richard (lanierichard@agcenter.lsu.edu) or Abigail Sartin (asartin@agcenter.lsu.edu)

Southeast Region Master Cattleman Program
When: Monday, April 7 to Monday, June 9, 2025
Weekly from 6 to 9 PM on Monday night.
Where: St. Helena Extension Office (8140 Highway 10, Greensburg, LA)
Contact: Dr. Gary Hay (ghay@agcenter.lsu.edu)

Southwest Region Master Cattleman Program
When: Thursday, May 1 to Thursday, July 10, 2025
Weekly from 6 to 9 PM on Thursday night.
Where: Calcasieu and Jeff Davis Parishes
Contact: Bradley Pousson (bpousson@agcenter.lsu.edu)

Breeding Soundness Exam Days
Central/Southwest Region
Dominique's Stockyards (Opelousas, LA)
Thursday, March 7, 2025
You MUST pre-register to attend.
Pre-register by calling the Lafayette office at (337-291-7090) or Brittany Zaunbrecher at (337-948-0561).
BSE cost is $55 and a BSE plus trichomoniasis test is $120.

Central Region
Thomson Vet Services (Alexandria, LA)
Monday, March 17, 2025
You MUST pre-register to attend.
Contact Tyler Barlow (tbarlow@agcenter.lsu.edu or 601-214-1415) to register.
BSE cost is $50 and trichomoniasis test is $90.

Beef and Forage Field Days
Jackson Parish Beef and Forage Field Day
Lemoines Feed and Seed (Weston, LA)
February 8, 2025, 9 AM to 1 PM
Contact Donny Moon (318) 628-4528 or wmoon@agcenter.lsu.edu

Acadiana Cattle Producers Spring Field Day
Saturday, March 15, 2025
Iberia Research Station (603 LSU Bridge Road, Jeanerette, La 70544)
Registration will begin at 8:00 AM.
Lunch will be provided.
Contact Lanie Richard (337-291-7090), Abigail Sartin (337-898-4335), or Blair Hebert (337-369-4440).

Northwest Beef and Forage Field Day
Thursday, April 24, 2025
Hill Farm Research Station (Homer, LA)
More information to come.

Parish Cattlemen's Association Meetings
DeSoto Parish Cattlemen's Association Meeting
March 4th at 6PM
DeSoto Parish Extension Office

Louisiana Producer Artificial Insemination School
April 2 through 4, 2025
Hill Farm Research Station (Homer, LA)
Contact Lee Faulk (afaulk@agcenter.lsu.edu) or Ashley Edwards (akedwards@agcenter.lsu.edu) to be placed on the wait list.
Registration cost is $300 with a $150 deposit.

Winter 2025

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