Regional Beef Notes
Winter 2010

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Three beef cattle management issues are costing area cattlemen dollars in their pockets and I want to briefly discuss these in this article. There are certainly more than these three areas that producers can improve on in order to increase profits but these are easily identified and corrected. The areas that I will address are selling light weight cattle, short or small framed cattle, and bull calves instead of steers.

I get asked all the time, “What are cattle bringing now?” and everyone wants to know price per pound. What we should be wanting to know is how many dollars per head are we making or even better how many dollars per brood cow exposed to a bull are we going to make. Or better yet, what about dollars per acre of grass. I hear from time to time about a calf bringing $1.10 a pound at the stockyard and after a little asking find out it weighed 350 pounds. Folks, that’s $385.00 and that is not enough per brood cow or per two acres (average stocking rate) to show a return back to the farm or to your pocket. The question you have to ask is, “Why was this calf marketed at 350 pounds?” Was he 8 months old and that is all he is going to grow? If so sell the cow and buy a better bull. Genetics is vital to putting pounds on calves and pounds of beef are what we are selling. Nutrition could be playing a role in this scenario as well and forage availability and stocking rate could be addressed. If this particular 350 pound calf is only 3-5 months old then consider holding on to them longer. Allow the cow to continue working for you and earning her keep. The following table looks at the 350, 550, and 750 pound calves sold on the same day at the same place (Stanly County Livestock Market on Wednesday, Dec. 2nd) and the important column to look at is dollars per head.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calf Weight (lbs)</th>
<th>Average $ per Pound</th>
<th>$ per Head</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>350</td>
<td>$1.0271</td>
<td>$359.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>550</td>
<td>$0.84</td>
<td>$462.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>750</td>
<td>$0.7885</td>
<td>$591.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The second issue is when looking at short and small framed cattle it is obvious that the pounds that we spoke of earlier won’t be there but what we don’t always see is the cattle buyer’s perspective. Your cattle are getting graded whether you are selling on a state graded feeder cattle sale or on the weekly livestock market and a short calf is a short calf no matter when or where you market it. Short cattle equal a smaller carcass and less beef with the same cost in processing and therefore less profit for someone down the road.

Once again genetics and frame score play a vital role and when we speak of short cattle we are talking about 3-4 framed cattle. There is a lot of talk in the cattle industry about cow size and efficiency and using more moderate framed cattle because of the cost of upkeep on large framed cattle but going to the extremes either way can be costly. The following table compares grade/frame score on calves and price per pound and per head on cattle sold on the same day at the same market.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade/Frame</th>
<th>$40 lb steer on Wed. September 2nd</th>
<th>620 lb steer on Thursday Oct. 22 Feeder Cattle Sale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S (small)</td>
<td>$0.77 = $415.80</td>
<td>$0.72 = $446.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M (medium)</td>
<td>$0.92 = $496.80</td>
<td>$0.86 = $533.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third issue that I want to address is the marketing of bull calves. When I visit the local livestock market during weekly sales it blows my mind how many bull calves are being sold on a weekly basis. That is a large sum of money going into someone else’s pocket as those light weight bull calves are being castrated and backgrounded by someone else. On the light weight (300-400 lb) calves there isn’t usually a large price difference between bulls and steers but we have already addressed selling light-weight cattle. The larger bull calves (and/or stags) is where the larger price differences become more obvious with usually a $0.08-$0.10 difference per pound. On a 700 lb bull, that is $70.00 less than a 700 lb steer. But I always hear the argument that bull calves will gain more weight than steers. In theory that is true due to natural hormones such as testosterone but that is also the reason that bull carcasses have a hard time grading choice. These carcasses become “dark cutters” and are not favorable meat cut options and therefore decrease the overall value of the carcass. These bull characteristics are also what makes these calves chase cows and butt heads, sparring for days while they could be steers minding their own business and gaining weight. They also become obviously harder to handle with bad attitudes and breed young heifers while fighting mature breeding bulls and possibly causing injury. Castration is a time proven management technique that will put money back into your pocket or the farm.

For more information on these beef cattle marketing and management practices contact your local Livestock Extension Agent.

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Norwood Area Feeder Cattle Sales Dates

- February 11 – Preconditioned Feeder Cattle Sale
- March 25 – Spring Stocker/Feeder Cattle Sale
- July 15
- July 22 – Value Added BQA
- August 19
- September 9 – Value Added BQA
- September 16
Persons with disabilities and persons with limited English proficiency may request accommodations to participate in the February 16 meeting at Jay's Seafood on Stony Gap Road in Albemarle by contacting Steve Lemons, Extension Agent, Agriculture, 704.983.3987 or steve_lemons@ncsu.edu, or in person at the County Extension office at least 10 days prior to the event.
Getting More Involved in the Beef Cattle Industry

By: Tiffanee Conrad-Acuña

As a member of the agriculture community, you may be wondering how you, your family, and your workers can become more involved with the beef cattle industry. The best place to start is with your local livestock Extension agent. They are available to provide you with unbiased scientific based information to help you improve your livestock program. Opportunities for education include formal meetings, subject matter newsletters and one-on-one visits to your farm.

By attending educational meetings in various counties you can learn about many topics related to the beef cattle industry including Beef Quality Assurance, updates on legislative and environmental regulations, information on the newest products and equipment available. You also have the opportunity to participate in programs to receive continuing education hour credits for animal waste licenses and Beef Quality Assurance certification. Educational meetings provide the opportunity to network with other area cattlemen and learn about how to encourage county youth to become involved in educational opportunities. Check with your local Extension agent for information about groups in your area that promote the beef cattle industry locally, statewide, and nationally.

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