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# The Great Plains News Feed

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Feedlot Tracking

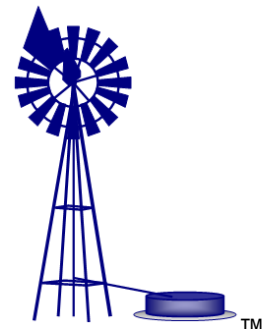
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**Great Plains Livestock  
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*"Turning Science into Money"*

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**March/April  
2012**

# The Latest Across the Plains

## Calving Tips

- 1) Delivery progress – to check if the calf is alive reach in and jerk its foot, pinch the skin between its toes, or stick a finger in its mouth. A reaction to these means it is alive. For a backward calf stick a finger in its anus to test muscle tone. A tight sphincter means it is alive while a completely loose one means it is dead.
- 2) Restraining a calving cow/heifer – use a head-catch that allows her to lie down without being strangled and with sides that swing out. Once she has been checked it is better if she lays down in order for her to strain more easily.
- 3) Pulling a calf – Use a lubricant to ensure a dry calf is pulled easier. Be sure to use a lubricant that is safe for both the mother and calf. Always pull when she is straining and rest when she rests; these things take time. Pushing the calf back in after a few pulls will help the calf's blood circulation and help ensure the calf breaths after delivery.
- 4) After calving
  - a. Make certain there is access to an abundant, quality water source.
  - b. Manage mineral intake – make sure mineral consumption is not too high or low. Have an adequate number of mineral feeders, place near water or common areas. Speak with your nutritionist about an appropriate mineral program.
  - c. Supervise Body Condition Score (BCS) – make sure cows are receiving adequate nutrition to return to a good BCS and improve chances of re-breeding. Cows are an expensive incubator and open cows are a source of no income.
- 5) Stay Safe

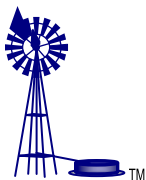
**ATTENTION CATTLEMEN** if you would like your sale date printed in the GPLC newsletter Calendar of Events, please contact Matthew Rawe at [Matthew.Rawe@GPLC-Inc.com](mailto:Matthew.Rawe@GPLC-Inc.com) or (402) 781-9378 so it can be included.

**BEEF PROFITRAC PROGRAM** If you are interested in utilizing our feedlot monitoring program to track your feedlot or growing operation's performance then please contact Brent Nelms at [Brent.Nelms@GPLC-Inc.com](mailto:Brent.Nelms@GPLC-Inc.com) or (402) 781-9378.

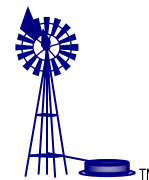
## Calendar of Events



- **March 13-14, 19-21** Nutrient Management Workshops, hosted by Nebraska Cattlemen's Assn., Multiple NE Locations.
- **March 15-17** North American Farm & Power Show, Owatonna, MN.
- **March 15-18** Four States Ag Expo, Montezuma County Fairgrounds, Cortez, CO.
- **March 21** Illinois Beef Assn. Legislative Day, Springfield, IL.
- **March 21** MN State Cattlemen's, Cattlemen at the Capitol, St. Paul, MN.
- **March 24** Missouri Cattlemen's Roundup, St. Joseph, MO.
- **March 27-28** Iowa Cattlemen's Assn./ YCLP Meeting, Des Moines/Ames, IA.
- **March 31** Passing on the Family Farm or Agribusiness Conference, hosted by K-State Research and Extension, Concordia, KS.
- **April 17-19** NCBA Legislative Conference, Washington, DC.
- **April 19-21** OKC Farm Show, OKC Fairgrounds, Oklahoma City, OK.
- **April 19-22** UNL Rodeo, Lancaster Event Center, Lincoln, NE.



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## Timely Reminders



### General

- ✓ Corn is too expensive to feed to parasites, worm your livestock.

### Beef

- ✓ Scrape snow from pens and keep aprons and approaches smooth.
- ✓ Place cows on a High-Mag mineral.
- ✓ Be ready to put up shades in the pens.
- ✓ Target a BCS of 5-5.5 on mature cows and 5.5-6.0 on heifers at calving.
- ✓ Be sure to adjust cow nutrition to match requirements as they calve.
- ✓ Decide which implant you will use on calves.
- ✓ Semen check bulls.
- ✓ Haul as much manure as possible out of pens.

### Unused Feed

- ✓ "There is nothing as useless as efficiently doing something that should not have been done at all."

## We Can't Improve What You Won't Keep Track Of



By Zeb Prawl, M.S., Ruminant Nutritionist

Accountants make great cattlemen. To an accountant, almost every decision they make is based on a number of some sort. And in the cattle business, every money making decision should be based on a number. As long as the accountant knows what numbers to look at, they usually can make the right decision.

Very seldom do cattlemen make good accountants.

Whether you run cows, graze stockers, or feed cattle for slaughter, the numbers tell the story about who makes a profit and who doesn't. The operator who pays attention to those numbers and makes management decisions based on them is the operator that will make it in today's agricultural economic conditions. With inputs being more than double what they were just 10 years ago, it doesn't take very many small, wasteful or inattentive expenditures on the farm to wipe away a year's profit. The problem is that cattlemen in general have a hard time keeping track of records.

I have been in the cattle nutrition business for almost 15 years and one thing I've learned when dealing with clients and producers of all types is that some are not good at keeping track of what they do with their cattle. From cow/calf producers who don't tag their calves or even write down when a calf is born, to feedyard managers who don't know how many cattle they have in a pen, I've dealt with a wide variety of record keeping issues. From a nutritionist's standpoint, we are much like the accountant. Our decisions and recommendations are based on numbers. Without the proper numbers and records being available to evaluate and form decisions, we are about as helpful as a truck without fuel. It just isn't going to go anywhere.

Don't interpret my words to mean that everyone I deal with doesn't know how to keep records. Quite the contrary, I work with several

clients that are phenomenal at keeping track of their records and at a moment's notice can tell you what their Cost of Gain was last week or last month, or how many head of cattle they have in each pen or pasture. Those producers are the ones who excel because they can take advantage of real time information on everything from a potentially good buy on a load of feed to knowing how many cattle need to be shipped and on what days from any part of their operation. Working with producers like these is a joy because of 2 reasons:

1. They have the information we need to help them quickly evaluate any situation that might arise in their operation, rather than having to guess at it.

2. Small changes in a feeding and/or management program usually produce small but measurable results. A producer keeping good track of records can evaluate the numbers and see those differences with their own eyes and, with the given results, evaluate the positive or negative effects of different decisions.

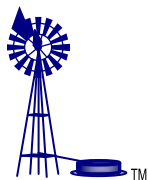
That being said, let's touch on some of the areas around the cattle operation that need constant attention and record keeping.

1. Cow/calf operations. Write down dates calves are born, starting with the very first and going until the very last is born. Tagging those calves to match them to their mommas is a plus. Just knowing how long this process takes can help one know if their calving cycle is too long and possibly identify infertility issues. Calves born later in the season will usually be lighter at weaning, which drags down herd profitability. Knowing which cows calved later in the season might be one way to cull when a heavy culling event needs to take place (like in the current Southwest US drought). Also, keep track of weaning weights. With calving dates being equal, heavier calves at weaning are the genetically superior calves, or came from a heavier milking mother, or both. In either case, those are the cows that you want to keep in the herd.

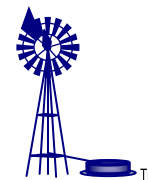
2. Stockers. If all you do with your cattle is turn them out on grass, graze them, then take them off and send them down the road, there are plenty of records you can be looking at. Starting body weight, number of days cattle are grazed, and ending body weights are just a start. You should also be keeping track of mineral and vitamin supplement being consumed, health records and any calves that need doctored, including foot rots and pinkeyes. And, the addition of a feeding program to calves while grazing to promote extra weight gain definitely requires good record keeping. It can deliver extra profit, but evaluating your numbers associated with feed amounts, rations costs, and costs of gains associated with doing so will help you determine how successful it was.

3. Starter/Grower Yards. Keeping track of head counts, daily feed offerings, in and out weights, etc. of feedlot cattle seems to me to make good sense. Believe it or not though, I have come across producers that didn't even keep track of this information in a finish yard! While these are the numbers that drive virtually every decision made in a finish yard, these numbers and several more are just as important to a producer running a Starter/Grower yard. Knowing the average daily gains, cost of gains, number of cattle being pulled and treated, etc. in a starter yard help determine the success of many aspects of the program including ingredient selection, treatment protocols, and ration formulation. If it is something that is regularly tracked in a finish yard, it should be tracked in start/grow yard too.

Being in a value added beef business these days demands good record keeping. Age and source verified programs demand it, but every producer should strive to create a good record keeping system. However, a good record keeping system does no good if the numbers



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are not analyzed and utilized. There are several commercially available programs that help a producer track his records and make sense of them. We at Great Plains Livestock Consulting, Inc. even have an in-house program available that was created by our Office Manager, Brent Nelms. Supplied with the proper data, Brent can help you track cattle performance in your operation and provide some useful reports that are key to helping you make informed management decisions. Making sense of what those numbers are telling you is what makes a good producer a great one. Employing the necessary support to help you understand your numbers also can be very rewarding. Whether it's working with your accountant to keep your bank accounts right, your veterinarian to keep the health numbers right, or your nutritionist to keep the feeding numbers right, having the right data to examine and knowing what to do with those numbers afterwards is the key to success. If we aren't already, let us at Great Plains Livestock Consulting, Inc. go through the numbers with you and determine your plan for greater success in your operation.

## Increasing Stocking Rate of the Beef Cow



*By Luke Miller, M.S., Ruminant Nutritionist*

High grain prices the last few years have driven land prices up dramatically. Pasture is getting very difficult to find, and extra hay could be next to impossible to find if some regions experience another dry year. However, in some areas we have already seen a relatively high level of heifer retentions this winter. As the national cow herd begins to rebuild for the future, the question is, where are these cattle going to go and what are they going to eat? We have had a number of producers come to us looking for an economical supplementation program to help increase stocking rate. Therefore, we decided to run a few comparisons between different feeding programs that would not require a high level of inputs and would be readily available on a commercial basis.

There are a number of commercially available feeding programs which utilize a self-feeder. Assume the scenario where mature cows consume 8 lbs/hd/day of supplemental feed. This would allow stocking rate to increase by about 15-25%. Assuming a mix of at least 50% protein/limiter supplement valued at \$0.30 per lb, and 50% corn at \$0.11 per lb, we arrive at a complete feed cost of \$410 per ton. If cows are limited to an intake of 8 lb/hd/day, the supplement alone would cost \$1.64/hd/day.

Another cow supplementation program to consider is a mixture of pelleted soybean hulls and pelleted corn gluten feed at a 1:1 ratio. Adding a pelleted mineral supplement to this mix at 250 lbs/ton, which also has the ability to control intake, would allow us to make a relatively fair comparison by looking at two feeding programs that both utilize a self-feeder. If gluten feed is valued at \$200/ton and soybean hulls are valued at \$180/ton, and the pelleted limiter costs \$0.35/lb, the complete feed would run about \$254/ton. If intake is also 8 lbs/hd/day, this mix adds \$1.02 to the cost of running a cow for one day. However, hand feeding a similar product, but without the self-limiting technology, would cost closer to \$0.76/hd/day. Of course, these are estimated values, but be sure to contact your local feed manufacturer or nutritionist to discuss current prices and develop a

program which may best fit your situation.

Tubs are a convenient way to provide additional protein to cows and help increase forage utilization. As with any product, you get what you pay for with a tub. Some have a high level of mineral fortification, and others have very little. Likewise, intake may vary from 0.5 lb/hd/day to over 1 lb/hd/day consumption. Assume we are feeding a molasses based tub that weighs 200 lbs, has an expected consumption of 0.6 lb/hd/day, and costs \$90. This product contains 20% crude protein and has a relatively high level of mineral fortification. This would cost \$0.27/hd/day and would only supply about 0.12 pounds of protein/hd/day. An alternative to tubs would be hand feeding 2 lbs of corn gluten feed along with a free choice mineral that does not contain phosphorus. Many free choice balancer minerals are available for cows fed corn-byproduct feeds. On average, these minerals cost about \$0.075/hd/day. Hand feeding 2 lbs of corn gluten feed at \$200/ton would cost another \$0.20/hd/day, so this would cost almost exactly the same as feeding the tub. However, because we are feeding 2 lbs of gluten feed, which is also about 20% crude protein, we would be supplying about 0.4 pounds of protein/hd/day or about 330% more.

As more and more hay fields are plowed under, we may have to revert to other options, such as utilizing wheat straw or corn stalks. Grinding these roughage products and mixing them with a wet by-product feed can make a great feedstuff for gestating or lactating cows, as well as growing cattle. Depending on the cost of high energy feeds compared to forages, a limit feeding program may be an alternative to help stretch hay. This involves keeping enough roughage in the diet to maintain rumen health, with the remainder of the diet being composed of more energy dense feeds, such as corn or by-products. Cattle would not have full access to feed, but would be limit-fed at a certain amount to meet energy requirements for maintenance and a desired level of production. This program may require additional management skills, labor, feed delivery equipment and plenty of bunk space, but in some instances can be as economical as feeding hay alone.

### Other Considerations:

Using grain, by-product feeds, or alternative roughage sources are one way to help stretch hay supply and increase stocking rate. However, don't forget about other management practices and technology that, if utilized together, can have a compounding effect on grazing efficiency. Controlled rotational grazing techniques have been shown to double grazing efficiency, according to University of Missouri Forage Extension Specialist Robert Kallenbach. A rotational grazing program doesn't have to be extremely intensive to be effective, but sub-dividing pastures into smaller paddocks using electric fence is a great way to increase forage utilization.

Finally, keep in mind that the use of an ionophore such as Rumensin® and Bovatec®, can improve feed efficiency by 3-5%. The cost of this product is about \$0.03/hd/day. With today's cost of production, it doesn't take long to figure that it more than pays for itself. Adding an ionophore to a free choice range mineral has been shown to help improve conception rates, and if fed to bred cows at least 60 days before calving, an ionophore may help reduce the incidence of coccidiosis in calves. Please don't hesitate to contact any of the GPLC team if you'd like to discuss some options that may best fit your operation.