

Volume 16, Number 1
January/February 2011

A voluntary
partnership
with private
landowners

IN THIS ISSUE:

Considering Summer Calving
Experts weigh in on the benefits.

Prevent Hay Storage Losses
Online analyzer helps evaluate which method works best.

Spotlight on TX GLCI
Workshop features stockmanship and sustainability strategies.

Upcoming Grazing Events
Mark your calendar!

Find Your Voice
Become an advocate for agriculture.



Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

Should you be calving in June instead?

Experts share tips for re-evaluating calving date

By Kindra Gordon

As the traditional January through March calving season begins for most ranchers, the thought of calving in June may have some appeal – and validity. Extension specialists say not only is the weather more favorable in June, but the forages are better matched to that calving time as well.

Jack Whittier, Extension beef specialist at Colorado State University, says, “Increasingly ranchers are recognizing that matching the physiology of the cow with the physiology of the plant is an important key to reducing costs. When calving season more closely matches forage growth, the cow is better able to meet her increased nutrient demand for milk production from grazing rather than from more expensive harvested feeds and supplementation.”

Likewise, Aaron Stalker, an assistant professor of ruminant nutrition at the University of Nebraska’s West Central Research and Extension Center in North Platte, says, “In my opinion one of the most common mistakes is that people try to change the forage nutrient supply to meet the cow’s needs. I suggest doing it the other way around – matching the cow’s needs to available forage nutrients – is more profitable,” says Stalker.

Specifically, Stalker says a change in calving date to better match forage resources can be a cost-effective option. He reports that research at the Gudmundson Sandhills Laboratory – which is operated as a working Nebraska ranch – has gathered data comparing June and March-calving herds for several years, and the June herd is more profitable than the March herd.

“The reason is because the June-calving herd has lower costs (primarily because of the need for less hay to be fed), not necessarily higher revenue,” explains Stalker. He says this is a prime example how matching forage resources to the cow’s nutrient needs can help reduce feed costs.

Stalker adds that more producers seem to recognize this and at least in Nebraska they are starting to see a shift toward more summer and fall calving. He cites a survey conducted in 1992 of producers in Western and Central Nebraska to monitor what season ranch operations calve in, and when a follow-up survey was conducted in 2002 an increasing number of summer and fall calving dates were revealed.

Stalker recognizes that for some operations a change to summer calving may not be an option if they have farm-ground and field-work that takes the bulk of their labor supply during the summer. But for those ranchers who calve in the spring simply because of tradition, he suggests it might be worth giving a second thought.

Points to Ponder

If you are considering a shift in your calving season date, Colorado State University Extension range specialist Roy Roath, emphasizes it’s not just about changing the time when

(continued on page 2)

Calving in June

(continued from page 1)

cows are bred. "Changing the calving season makes a profound difference on forage management. Producers need to look at the types of forage they have available, the grazing pressure on them during different seasons, and determine carrying capacity," he says.

As an example, Roath points out that with summer calving, young calves are often carried over to the following spring. This can pose some new management concerns. For instance, Roath says the increased number of management groups needs to be addressed. And, if you plan to keep calves over the winter determine how you'll manage and market them. "It's important to look at flexibility," Roath says.

He suggests answering the following questions:

- Are you prepared to handle young calves during winter storms?
- Will you be able to handle multiple herds such as cow/calf, bulls, yearling steers and heifers, and two-year-old cows during that timeframe?
- Do you have enough forage? and
- What will your marketing plan be to fit this new system?

Additionally, CSU's Whittier adds, "The benefits of price cycles by marketing calves during times when supplies are traditionally lower and prices are higher is a consideration. But the impact on cash flow must also play into the planning for such changes."

Overall, Roath says, "Producers need to think through their contingency plan. When a new system is properly thought through it can be a benefit to the operation. Without planning it can become a disaster."

His advice to ranchers evaluating a change in calving season is to pay particular attention to available forage and carrying capacity. He suggests that leasing pasture or crop residue may be necessary.

Whittier and Roath say the bottomline is that there are several interacting factors that a rancher must consider before moving calving date

And, to those operations that plan to continue with a spring calving herd, UNL's Stalker suggests looking for ways to extend grazing options as much as possible, through stockpiled forages or crop residues.

He tells that the Gudmundson Lab has conducted research looking at the amount of hay fed and has found that extending winter grazing of a March-calving herd can help reduce the amount of hay fed compared to traditional feeding. "Whenever a producer can extend grazing of winter range feed costs can be decreased," says Stalker.

Hay Storage Cost Analyzer Available Online

Many producers spend a lot of time and money producing hay, only to lose as much as a quarter of it to improper storage. Iowa State University (ISU) is offering a new decision aid for comparing the costs of different hay storage options.

Available on ISU Extension's Ag Decision Maker (ADM) website, the free electronic spreadsheet can compare up to eight alternatives at a time.

The standard for comparison is storing bales on bare ground with no cover. This is the least-cost method, but also results in the most storage loss. Other methods include outdoor uncovered storage on gravel or pallets, outdoor covered storage, storage under a roof, and storage in a new or existing building.

Several types of cost are considered in the analysis. Initial investments in storage structure, tarps, gravel and pallets are amortized over their individual expected lives. Annual costs such as repairs, insurance and property taxes are part of the spreadsheet, as are estimated labor costs for storing and feeding the hay. And, the estimated value of spoilage losses under each system is considered.

Users need to enter the expected volume of hay to be produced or that's needed, current hay prices and the size of bales they use. For each method, a total annual cost is calculated, which includes spoilage losses and the tons of hay available to feed or sell.

The Excel®-based spreadsheet "Hay Storage Cost Comparison" can be downloaded at www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/crops/xls/a1-15haystoragecost.xls.



GLCI BOOKSHELF

Pastures of Plenty: The Future of Food, Agriculture and Environmental Conservation in New England

— By John E. Carroll; Foreword by Agriculture Commissioner, Steve Taylor

In all of the preparations we must now make in order to respond to the demands of greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction (80% to 90% reduction in CO₂ by 2050 or sooner) and the end of the era of cheap oil, our greatest challenge will not be transportation nor home heating, but food and the threat to our food supply.

Princeton petroleum geologist Kenneth Deffeyes, author of Beyond Hubbert's Peak: The End of Oil, has said that agriculture is the first victim of peak oil. James Howard Kunstler, author of The Long Emergency, has written that "Agriculture is going to come back to the center of the American way of life in a way that we couldn't imagine." Matthew Simmons, Houston oil analyst and investment banker, tells us that local agriculture will be of critical importance to our future.

Thus, John E. Carroll in his new book offers a response for his locale, New England: grass-based agriculture. The how and why for a return to grazing, for a full range of dairy and meat product (not only cows, dairy and beef, but also sheep, pigs, goats and poultry); for integration with diversified horticulture for vegetable and fruit; and for integration with forestry, is spelled out in detail in this book published by the University of New Hampshire.

A sequel to his earlier work on sustainable agriculture at the local level, The Wisdom of Small Farms and Local Food: Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic and Sustainable Agriculture, Prof. Carroll's latest work takes a close look at the prospects for this region.

NHAES Publication 2340, 142 pages, \$15.00 soft cover – for more information contact Dr. John Carroll, carroll@unh.edu or 603-862-3940.

STATE SPOTLIGHT: TEXAS GLCI

Ranch Management Clinic Focuses on Stockmanship, Sustainability

- Submitted by Melissa Blair, Public Affairs Specialist, Texas NRCS

The Coastal Prairies GLCI, South Texas GLCI, Texas Coalition Grazinglands Conservation Initiative and the Texas AgriLife Extension Service partnered to host a Ranch Management Clinic on September 28, 2010 in Beeville, Texas. More than 200 livestock operators, landowners and managers attended the workshop focusing on effective stockmanship, including, low-stress livestock handling methods and ranch sustainability and profitability through management and input eliminating strategies.

Curt Pate demonstrated stockmanship techniques, and emphasized that when livestock are handled using low stress techniques, profitability will be realized through less shrink, less sickness and the need for medicine can be drastically reduced.

Pate's tips included: Make sure the cattle can see you. Don't make sharp, loud noises. Don't rush the animals.

"I work the eye. That's our best form of communication with the animal, the pressure we put on his eye," Pate said. "The way they see us is how they move from us. When I put on pressure, they know that if they move away from me, I will take the pressure off."

The afternoon session focused on ranch sustainability through implementing sound management practices while reducing or eliminating inputs from the ranching operation.

Colorado rancher, Kit Pharo, shared his philosophies saying, "I do whatever I can to increase production without increasing expenses, as well as doing everything I can to reduce expenses without reducing production."

He added, "I am not going to ignore production, but realize that my management decisions need to be profit-driven instead of production-driven. Producing cows that fit their environment is necessary for low input production, and those low input cow-calf producers will be the only people making a profit."

According to Pharo, the most profitable ranches have one thing in common: they make the most efficient use of available forage resources on their ranch. There are three distinctive management practices he teaches to accomplish this objective:

- 1) Planned Rotational Grazing –Move cattle according to how fast the grass is growing; maximize rest periods; and plan for year-round grazing.
- 2) Calving in sync with nature; this matches the cow's highest nutritional requirements to the ranches highest and best production.
- 3) Producing cows that can survive strictly on what the ranch produces with minimum or no inputs.

"Striving for sustainability doesn't necessarily mean that producers must completely change the way they operate, rather, that they start by making a few tweaks to their current management strategies," said Pharo.



Curt Pate provides a lesson on Foot Working cattle, probably the most common method of working cattle on average to smaller sized ranches. His advice was to work the nose of the animal and the rest will follow.



Curt Pate describes how sight, feel and sound are used in working cattle. These principles, when used correctly are applied to induce "pressure" on livestock in a low stress manner.



Curt Pate demonstrates the pressure distance required to get a positive reaction from the cattle. Pate stressed the importance of developing a presence to the livestock in a manner that would not cause fear but influence movement.

UPCOMING GRAZING EVENTS

Jan. 25-26 -- Heart Of America Grazing Conference, Holiday Inn Hurstbourne/I-64 East, Louisville, KY. View program at www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage

Jan. 27-28 -- 13th Annual Midwest Value Added Ag Conference, Sheraton Hotel, Madison, WI. Featuring 35 speakers and 40 exhibitors, Keynote address by Joel Salatin of Polyface Farm. For more info see www.rivercountrycd.org/valad.html

Jan. 28-29 -- Winter Green-Up Grass-Fed Beef Conference, Century House, Route 9 Latham, NY. Also featuring farmer and author Joel Salatin, Polyface Farms, Swoope, VA, who has written numerous articles and books on raising grass-fed beef, pork, and poultry, as well as direct marketing. For more visit www.ccealbany.com.

Feb. 13-15 -- 19th Annual Wisconsin Grazing Conference, Wilderness Territory Resort in Wisconsin Dells, WI. Hosted by GrassWorks, Inc., the theme "Grounded in Grazing," reflects this year's focus on soil, as well as the down to earth nature of the event and its participants. For details visit <http://grassworks.org/>

A New Year's Resolution to Consider: Become an “Ag Advocate”

By Shan Ingram, Noble Foundation

Farmers and ranchers have become a huge minority. Today, approximately 2% of the U.S. population is involved in farming or ranching. Of that number, more than half are small operators. Therefore, less than 1% of our population is truly engaged in farming. The majority of our population doesn't know when, where or how their food gets to them. They expect it to magically be there when they need it.

How can such a minority survive? I think we need to study how others have been successful in advancing their causes. Generally, they have:

- been dedicated to a purpose;
- been very persistent;
- been very vocal to draw attention to themselves or their issues;
- targeted a small number of key issues; and
- raised money very aggressively.

I am not advocating that we employ all of the actions and methods that some minority groups have used; however, I think there are lessons to be learned. Unity is a key issue. We need to seek common ground and work together to accomplish meaningful goals.

The general population is far removed from farms and ranches. There is a wide gap in knowledge, understanding and perception between production agriculture and the general population. The public doesn't understand that fertilizer, pesticides and biotechnology are good things when used properly.

They have watched too many movies and listened to too many slanted “news reports” that are based on emotion and fear rather than facts and science. Many children don’t know that beef comes from cattle and think that milk and eggs originate at the grocery store. They think cereal comes from a box without realizing that it was grown on a farm. We must become advocates of agriculture. We have to do a better job of telling our story and explaining our position, or we may not have a story to tell.

What Can You Do? How can you make a positive impact?

- Become more active in producer organizations. Be a member of the local, state and national organizations that represent you.
 - Attend local meetings and have an influence on what is happening regarding issues and policy.
 - Learn the issues - be informed and proactive.
 - Engage people you encounter in your daily life. Tell the good things about agriculture and know the facts. Avoid being negative or argumentative as this generally hurts your credibility and the industry.
 - Be dedicated to purpose and avoid coming across as unintelligent or argumentative. Strive to represent what is right with farming and ranching, not what's wrong with it.



To have your GLCI activities or upcoming events highlighted in this newsletter, contact Kindra Gordon at phone 605-722-7699 or kindras@gordonresources.com.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, gender identity, political beliefs, ethnicity, or income. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication, such as Braille, large print, audio tape, or computer disk, should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2820 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Office of Civil Rights, 1401 Independence Avenue, S. W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Visit the GLCI homepage at <http://www.glicl.org>

National Association of Conservation Districts	(202) 547-6233
National Catlemen's Association	(202) 347-0228
Beefer Association	(202) 347-1600
National Farmers Union	(202) 595-2309
Society for Range Management	(303) 986-3309
Soil and Water Conservation Society	(515) 289-2331, ext 13

Contact these affiliated organizations: