

FEED FOR THOUGHT



News For Cattlemen From Suga-Lik® A Product Of U.S. Sugar Corp.

A SOLUTION TO THE REBREEDING DILEMMA - EARLY WEANING

Chet Fields, Ph.D. PAS



It can be a challenge to get first, second and third calf heifers to rebreed on time...or even at all! Early weaning effectively eliminates the nutritional demands of lactation and typically results in improved reproductive performance, especially in heifers. Research conducted by Dr. John Arthington, University of Florida, exploring the application of “early weaning” in Florida’s tropical environment offers the potential to improve reproductive efficiency and profitability. At the Ona Range Cattle Research and Education Center, his recent study of heifers calving as three-year-olds demonstrated that early weaning increased the heifers’ body condition scores from 4.5 to 6.25; heifer body weights from 982 lbs to 1,074 lbs and pregnancy rates from 50% to 89.5%. In this study heifers were bred as two-year-olds and calved as three-year-olds in October and November. Calves were weaned in January at approximately 70 days of age. Upon weaning these early-weaned calves were placed on rye grass “nursery” pastures and provided supplemental nutrients. In May, the early-weaned calves were placed on limpo grass pasture. Compared to normally weaned calves, the early-weaned calves gained better while on rye grass and poorer than normally weaned calves after being placed on limpo grass. Overall, early weaning resulted in higher calf costs and poorer gains but pregnancy rates were much better for dams of the early-weaned calves.

The question arises, will the economic benefit of the increase in pregnancy rate reported by Dr. Arthington

compensate for the higher costs and lower market weight of the early-weaned calves? The following chart addresses that question. The calf value/cwt used in the projection is an approximation of the average prices over the last five years for May and September marketing. Calves sold in May historically sell for two to four dollars more per hundred pounds than those sold in September (source, CattleFax).

		NORMALLY WEANED		EARLY WEANED		
	Units	\$ Value/cwt	\$ Value/hd	\$ Value/cwt	\$ Value/hd	
Birth Wt (Oct/Nov)	lbs	75.00		75.00		
70 day Wt @ 2 lb ADG	lbs	215.00		215.00		
ADG Jan 1 to May 15	lbs	1.48		1.89		
May 15th Weight	lbs	380.76	\$102.00	\$388.38	426.68	\$102.00
ADG May 15 to Sep 1	lbs	1.81		1.21		
September 1st Weight	lbs	570.81	\$86.00	\$490.90	553.73	\$86.00
Cost/hd for early weaning (seed, fert, feed, etc).	\$					\$67.74
Income/hd after costs of early weaning	\$					\$408.47
Pregnancy Rate	%	50.0		89.5		
Lbs calf sold/100 Cows (if all pregnant calve)	lbs	285.41		495.59		
Gross Sales less added costs of early weaning	\$	\$140,104		\$202,433		
Annualized Return to Management for Early Weaning	%			44.49%		

Daily gains, additional cost/hd for early weaning and pregnancy rates are those reported by Arthington et al

With the assumptions made on calf market prices and using Dr. Arthington’s performance data it appears that early weaning may be an economically attractive management practice. In addition, the early-weaned calf program provides

the rancher who chooses to retain calf ownership with a large “window of opportunity” for marketing, placement on improved pasture or into the feedlot. If shipped directly to the feedlot, additional benefits are higher quality grades and better feed efficiency than heavier, older calves. A substantial additional benefit will likely be earlier breeding of the cow after she calves and a heavier next calf at weaning. Yet another potential benefit of early weaning is increased pasture carrying capacity. Compared to a cow in a normal weaning program, it’s estimated that cows participating in the early weaning program will consume approximately one and one-half to two lbs less forage dry matter from the time of early weaning to the time of normal weaning. That equates to an 8% to 11% increase in pasture carrying capacity. This may be especially important during a typically dry late winter and spring season.

It is essential to remember that weaned calves weighing 200 lbs to 500 lbs require dietary nutrient supplements that are substantially higher in nutrient density than similar weight calves that are nursing. Suga-Lik® Rye-Mate (#610) is a great source of supplemental vitamins, minerals and energy for calves while they’re on rye grass. Bahia and Bermuda forage quality is typically better than limpo grass from May through August. Therefore, consider placing early-weaned calves on Bahia or Bermuda pastures instead of limpo grass when they come off rye grass nurseries in April or May. Supplementing these calves from April or May through August or September with 3 lbs/head per day of citrus pulp pellets and 2 lbs/head per day of “Fully Fortified™” Suga-Lik® Pasture Supplement HD/32 with Fat and Alimet™ (#807) will provide a well balanced nutrition program and produce gains which are at least as good as those of normally weaned calves.

The details of Dr. Arthington’s research can be found at the following Ona web sites:

<http://www.ifas.ufl.edu/~ona/or9-01.html> and
<http://www.ifas.ufl.edu/~ona/or12-01.html> Alternately, contact your Suga-Lik® representative for copies of these reports and assistance with an early weaning program projection.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU’RE THROUGH!

Terry Weaver

When fall-winter-spring supplement season is through, a sound liquid supplement program is not necessarily complete. Storage and maintenance of liquid supplement equipment is the often neglected, often forgotten, part of a liquid supplement program. Simple steps to wrap up the season will make next feeding season much easier to begin, as well as save you money on rusted or broken parts. Listed below are some simple, yet important, tips for equipment maintenance.

Lick feeders should be cleaned out and stored under cover. One-piece lick tanks can be turned upside down to let molasses solids drain out. Inventory of feeder parts needs to be checked and noted and replacement parts ordered and stored so they will be ready for the next feed season. This will alleviate problems with back-ordered parts or supplies next season.

All pumps should be rinsed, checked, and oiled thoroughly before storage. Repairs and repacking should be completed so that the pump will be in good working order for next feeding season.

Delivery tanks or wagons should be emptied, rinsed, and stored under cover. Valves and bearings should be greased, repacked, or replaced if needed. Tires, wheels, and axles should be checked and replaced if needed.

Bulk tanks should be rinsed to flush away molasses solids and collected rust (from metal storage). Once clean, the tank can be completely filled (no air space) with liquid feed or plain water to inhibit excessive condensation which induces rusting. Valves need to be oiled, greased or treated with never-seize.



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