

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Wheat Pasture Grazing Prospects, Fall 2007

By Derrell S. Peel

As wheat producers struggle to get wheat crops established this fall, many are considering the prospects for grazing stocker cattle on wheat this winter. The continued high feedlot cost of gain makes forage based stocker gain more attractive and this is evident in the projected grazing budgets this fall. A stocker budget with typical assumptions is summarized below:

Winter Grazing, Early November – Early March

- Purchase 450 pound steers @ \$134/cwt.
- Gain 2 lbs./day for \$0.40/lb. of gain
- 2 % death loss, \$12/head Vet/Med
- \$4.50/head/month other costs
- 10 % Interest, \$15/head marketing
- ***Sell 688 pound steers after 119 days***
- ***Selling Breakeven \$112.69***

At the current time, March Feeder Futures are trading at about \$112.00/cwt. The March basis for a 688 pound steer is estimated conservatively at \$3.50/cwt, which means that it is possible to hedge a 688 pound steer now for sale in March at \$115.50/cwt.

The hedge price compared to the selling breakeven implies a return to the cattle of \$2.81/cwt. or 19.33/head. For the wheat producer grazing owned wheat, the budget is also providing a return

of \$0.40/ pound of gain to the wheat, which is an additional \$95.20/head. Thus the total return to cattle and wheat is \$114.53/head.

Since some additional wheat production expense should be charged against the grazing enterprise to cover the additional seed, fertilizer and other wheat production costs for grazing, the producer may want to look at the grazing activity on a per acre basis rather than per head. Assuming a stocking rate of 1.6 acres per steer (roughly 280 pounds of liveweight per acre), the wheat pasture returns above are equal to \$59.50/acre and the total return to cattle and wheat pasture is \$71.58/acre. These returns should be evaluated against the additional wheat production costs and potential yield losses associated with grazing.

The budget above also includes a labor charge for animal care so the producer providing all the labor for stocker production is also paying himself about \$12.00/head (or \$7.50/acre) in labor returns in this budget.

The projected returns in this budget are based on hedging March Feeder cattle at current futures prices. If a producer does not actually hedge the cattle, there is risk that the feeder cattle market in March will not be at the levels projected in this budget. There is a significant risk of another corn price shock to feeder cattle markets in the spring. If it happens, it may not last very long, but the timing may be critical given the need to remove wheat pasture cattle at first hollow stem. The market today offers an opportunity to significantly reduce this risk by forward pricing the cattle with a futures hedge or perhaps by forward cash contracts with feedlots. Producers are advised to consider risk management needs as well as return potential when evaluating wheat pasture grazing prospects this fall.

Starting Cool Season Stockers

Dave Sparks, DVM

As the days get shorter and the weather cools off, it is time for many of you to start thinking about buying and starting stocker calves for cool season grasses and wheat pasture. Although wheat grazing may be down this year due to high grain prices, we have had a great year for grass, and there should be lots of cool season pasture available. Proper processing and starting can eliminate a lot of health problems before they strike.

Everyone has a favorite vaccination program, but remember that vaccines don't eliminate infections; they help the body's immune system to deal with them. It is probably not as important which vaccine products you use as it is how well the calves are able to respond. Several things can decrease the animal's ability to respond to the vaccines you invest in. Animals must be on a good nutritional status. Protein and trace minerals are especially important. When buying calves, the thin calves may look good from a pay weight standpoint, but if they are not immunologically competent you may be buying trouble. Cattle coming off of a long haul will need to rest and recover from the stress before they are processed. Provide good food and water to allow them to replace the shrink and dehydration. A good rule of thumb is to allow them to rest one hour for each hour they were on the road from the time they left their previous home until they are in your care. Young calves may not have their immunological

system developed enough to respond well to vaccines. These calves may need to be revaccinated later to get a good response.

Consider buying calves that are weaned or preconditioned. Calves that are right off the cow can't respond well to vaccines because of the stress of weaning. Always remember that anything that causes stress, depresses the immune response. In addition, calves that are not accustomed to eating supplemental feed will not be able to maintain a good nutritional status during the conditioning period. It typically takes at least 10 to 14 days for the calf to develop protection from the vaccines you give. If he is exposed to pathogens at the sale barn, he may have serious health problems before this protection can develop. Calves that have been given vaccines before they are weaned, shipped and exposed should have a degree of protection in place when they need it. Preconditioned calves can look awfully high priced when you are buying calves, but a lot cheaper after you have had a big drug bill or heavy death loss.

Once you get the calves home and into your starting lots, remember that a thermometer is the best friend you can have. Calves that are developing respiratory disease will show elevated temperatures 24 to 48 hours before they show obvious outward signs. Since early detection and treatment is the biggest factor in quick recoveries and decreased chronics, this time difference can be crucial. Pull and "temp" calves as soon as you suspect a decrease in appetite or activity. Remember to "if in doubt, check it out". If you are pulling a few calves that prove to have normal temperatures, you are probably getting all or most of the ones that should be treated.

Today we have several good antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs that are very effective in treating respiratory disease, but they all have in common that they are expensive. In this case an ounce of prevention is truly worth a pound of cure.

Interval Feeding of Protein Supplement to Cows on Range

by Glenn Selk

Dry, pregnant beef cows grazing low quality warm season pastures in late summer, fall, and early winter are usually supplemented with high protein supplements. It would be desirable to feed the supplement at less frequent intervals (than daily) to reduce labor and equipment costs. A study done at OSU in the 1990's has indicated that cows fed the same amount of total 40% crude protein supplement either 3 or 6 days per week perform similarly. Interestingly enough, similar research was reported almost 40 years ago with similar results. Below in table 1 are the results of the most recent experiment. Cows were fed 21 pounds of protein cubes per week from November 17 until March 9. From March 10 to April 22, cows were fed 28 pounds of supplement and only 17.5 pounds per week from April 23 to May 15. Cows were provided free choice grass hay when snow or ice covered the standing forage, or when the temperature was less than 40 degrees and raining, or was less than 25 degrees at noon. Cows were exposed to bulls for 75 days beginning May 17 and palpated for pregnancy 90 days after the breeding season. **In this trial, the cattle performance was virtually identical and was not affected by the interval at which the cows were fed the protein supplement.**

Table 1. Influence of supplementation interval on body weight, body condition score, and pregnancy rate of beef cows. (Wettemann and Lusby, 1994 OSU Animal Science Research Report)

Days supplement fed per week	3 days	6 days
Number of cows	62	61
Body weight in November	1186	1210
Weight loss to April (after calving)	242	255
Body condition score in November	5.4	5.4
Body condition score in April	4.4	4.3
Pregnancy rate	98%	94%

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