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Cull Cows-Market Cows

“A Rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” Shakespeare had the right idea; a name is just a name. The current thought is we should call cull cows, market cows because what consumers would want to eat a cull? I suppose it has merit, but then I don’t like change.

Approximately 10 to 20 percent of the returns to the cow/calf operation are from selling market cows. So how can you add value to them? There are four things to consider, the cows can be thin, but they must be healthy. Secondly, the buy/sell margin should be positive. The cost of gain needs to be cheap, and finally, only those that can take the risk should attempt to feed out market cows.

Make sure the cows are thin due to lactation and not some other problem. Cows with lung damage may appear thin and unthrifty. Cows with big parasite loads will be inefficient unless treated. Cows with other infections, like foot rot or mastitis, may not do as well. Cows over 4 years of age will have a poorer rate of gain than younger cows.

Based on KSU Research, cows are fat enough for slaughter once they get a body weight of 22 pounds per inch height at the cow’s withers. This is a simple formula, it may not be perfect, but for the vast majority of market cows, it works.

Most cows are culled in the fall at weaning time, so they are usually worth less per pound than any other time of the year. The prices are lowest October thru December, then prices rise and peak out in March to May.

The ideal situation for feeding market cows is if Utility cow prices are relatively high and feed prices are low. This offers the potential of costs of gain being lower than the selling price.

Feeding market cows grain-based diets for only 30 days will result in the most rapid and efficient gains. However, the producer is subject to very short-term price changes.

If you can take the risk you may consider feeding roughage diets throughout the winter, and then the final 30-50 days feed grain before marketing. This gives you the chance to take advantage of the market changes that have historically happened.

Feeding ionophores and using an aggressive implant can greatly improve feedlot performance and carcass performance. They will stimulate intake, improve gains, and feed efficiency. Implants can increase lean muscle gain (at the sacrifice of fat deposition) and can also negatively impact tenderness. Consult your veterinarian for the best implant to use.

Feeding market cows can increase body weight, value, and utilize cheap feedstuffs. Value of gain is equal to the difference between the ending value and beginning values divided by the gain. Compare this to cost of gain figures. When cost of gain is less than value of gain, profit will be realized.

David G. Hallauer

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Managing Forages in the Early Fall

Feed costs make up a big part of the cow-calf budget, making them a focal point of most producers. Forage management now could help keep at least some of those ‘costs’ at bay.

First, remember that forage recovery prior to dormancy is important. One of the reasons we discuss grazing/haying height is because maintaining appropriate forage biomass is integral to the plant’s ability to get ready for winter and take off again next spring. For cool season grass pastures, maintain five to six inches of height at all times. That means managed grazing as we approach the end of the growing season or avoiding harvest that might prevent timely recovery.

Alfalfa stands deserve the same type of pre-dormancy attention. Make the last cutting, so there will be eight to 12 inches of foliage (four to six weeks of growth) prior to the first killing frost (on/around mid-October) to allow adequate time for root reserve replenishment. If you haven’t taken that late cutting by now, consider delaying until after the first killing freeze. Harvest now has the potential to reduce the stand and slow green up next spring.

If extending the growing season is of interest, manage accordingly. Tall fescue tends to tolerate late fall/winter grazing better than brome grass or native species - with much greater quality – but only when managed appropriately. Avoid overgrazing now that might reduce winter stockpile opportunities that could help reduce feed costs.

Now is also time to finalize decisions on cover crops for grazing. Want to see what some of your options are? Check out the Midwest Cover Crops Council Selector Tool available online at <http://mccc.msu.edu/covercroptool/>. Simply input your location and the purpose of the cover crop planting and then check out the results. If you want further information on a particular crop, including seeding rates, termination methods, performance, and cultural traits, a simple click on the crop will provide it. The tool has recently been updated to reflect changes in weather data and research in the state.

Fall is *not* ‘cruise control’ time for forage crops. There’s still a lot of management season left to make sure our forages finish the growing season strong with an eye towards next year.

Adding Organic Materials to the Garden

When we talk about improving soil structure in the garden, we typically focus on the addition of composted materials. That can be a slow process, and a bit of a waiting game as materials in the compost pile break down and become usable.

Fall, however, is a great time to bypass that compost pile by adding organic materials directly to the soil rather than composting. Used up mulch, rotted silage, fallen leaves, even grass clippings (unless treated with a crabgrass *killer*...) can be tilled directly in to the garden area and allowed to break down through the winter as the garden sits idle.

Spread materials across the garden to a depth of three inches and till in (never incorporate when soils are too wet or we’ll hurt the soil structure we’re trying to help...). Shredding of coarser materials is suggested. Material decomposes quickly as long as temperatures remain warm, so the process can be repeated every two weeks. Later in the fall, it may take longer. This process can be repeated from now until late November to early December.

Cindy Williams

Meadowlark Extension District
Food, Nutrition, Health, and Safety

September is Food Safety Education Month

September is widely known as Food Safety Education Month. Knowing a little something about protecting yourself from foodborne illness is essential all the time.

We eat food every day, so keeping food safe is a daily event. Using basic, safe food handling practices can eliminate many opportunities for foodborne illness.

In September and every month, the virtues of food safety's four core principles:

***Clean** - Wash hands and keep cooking surfaces clean.

***Cook** - Use a food thermometer to ensure foods are cooked to a safe internal temperature and to keep hot foods hot.

***Chill** - Put leftovers in the refrigerator promptly and keep cold foods cold.

***Separate** - When preparing and serving meals, keep raw foods away from cooked and ready-to-eat foods.

Good hygiene—always a food safety tenet, has come into greater light during the coronavirus pandemic, especially the importance of washing your hands. Handwashing is your primary defense against spreading disease, not only for food safety but overall health.

Nancy Nelson
Meadowlark Extension District

Family Life

How to Dispose of Medications Properly

A recent report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates that 44% of men and 57% of women older than 65 years take five or more medications per day.

Here are three ways of disposing of outdated or unused medications properly.

Drop off unused medicines when a take-back day or drop-off site is offered in or near your community. Also, remember to scratch off the label or mark it out so that your name, address and type of medication cannot be read by another person.

Mix medications into kitty litter, used coffee grounds or other undesirable substance and place in a seal top reclosable bag. Then, dispose of it in household trash. Many pharmacies also sell medication disposable bags that inactivate medications placed in the bag.

If you have no other disposal option, only medications that are approved for flushing should be disposed of this way. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has a short list of medications that can be flushed. To see the list, do an Internet search for 'FDA Flush List.'