***Nutrition*** of Soil, Forage and Beef Cattle

Your 2019 calf crop has crossed the halfway point of days to weaning! As we start heading into the fall season it’s time to measure the forage available in the pasture and prepare the land and cattle for the future. We often don’t consider the soil fertility level in our pastures or realize the options available to extend days of grazing for our cow herds. Also, managing the “year around nutrition” of our herd positions us for top calf health and performance. A little time spent planning now can lead to big benefits for the 2020 calf crop and grazing season!

Late Season Grazing Considerations:

1. Pastureland is often thought of as land that isn’t suitable for growing crops. But, managing this valuable resource can pay big dividends in producing quality top yielding forage in a sustainable way! Have you ever soil sampled your pasture? Reviewing soil sample results allows us to manage the soil fertility level in our pastures! According to Extension publication A2809, grass pasture has N,P,K and micronutrient requirements. Consider committing time to soil sampling your pastures. It very well could unlock new potential for increasing forage yield while managing input cost!
2. August is a good time to assess the forage level of our pastures! Management decisions including: time of weaning, sale of cull cows and limiting overgrazing are all better determined once the forage level has been estimated. Many techniques are available to estimate the amount of standing forage dry matter. One of the handiest, is the NRCS Grazing Stick. Days of grazing in our pastures can be extended by weaning the calves and removing the demand of lactation. Once calves reach 6-7 months of age, they can consume approximately half of the forage of a mature cow and a lactating cow will consume significantly more forage than she will once dry. Because of these factors, it becomes more efficient to feed the calves separately from the cows as they travel further along the lactation curve. Will weaning earlier increase days of grazing on your farm and lead to more efficient beef production? Good results will come from combining good management and good recommendations with the cooperation of outside forces!
3. Most beef cows are currently entering their second trimester of gestation. This can be a time of significant body condition change if forage levels are slimming and lactation continues. Ongoing research efforts around fetal programing have found important fetal development processes take place during all three stages of gestation. The second trimester is highlighted by muscle formation, which leads to pounds at sale time, meat tenderness and organ development, such as female reproductive organs. Adequate nutrition and ideal body condition scores are important to remain focused on as fall approaches. We are really considering the future production and profit potential of three separate beef animals at this one time!

Next year’s success depends on the management decisions made this fall! Don’t sacrifice a productive and profitable 2020 by overlooking key management decisions this fall. Understand the current soil fertility level of your pasture. Assess the forage available and be careful not to overgraze or draw down body condition of the cow herd. Ongoing research around fetal programing is necessary, but the results so far are clear, attention to “year around nutrition” of the beef cow is essential in reaching top levels of calf health and performance. If questions remain of how to take on these initiatives, reach out to your local Extension Educator, we are ready and willing to help! Also, check out The WI Beef Information Center at fyi.extension.wisc.edu/wbic/cowcalf/ for additional resources to help make informed decisions!

*Resources:*

*UNL Extension: G2057 Management, Health, and Nutritional Considerations for Weaning Calves*

*Karla H. Jenkins, Dee Griffin, and L. Aaron Stalker*

*NDSU Extension: Early Weaning Beef Calves*

*Greg Lardy, Carl Dahlen*

*NC State Extension: AG-819-01 Fetal Programming: Cow Nutrition and its Effects on Calf Performance*

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