Livestock & Natural Resources Newsletter

JULY 2009

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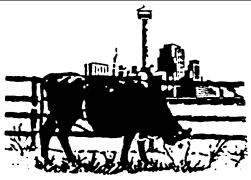


BEEF CATTLE SHORTCOURSE

The 55th Annual Texas A&M Beef Cattle Short Course is scheduled August 3 – 5, 2009 at Texas A&M University in College Station.

"Planning committee members from around the state have met with us and helped us put together another outstanding program," said Dr. Jason Cleere, Texas AgriLife Extension beef cattle specialist and conference coordinator.

Drought, high production costs, emerging diseases and a weakened market have made this is a challenging year for cattle producers, Cleere said. The Short Course, sponsored by Texas AgriLife Extension Service, will address these issues as well as other topics during the three-day event, providing information for both the novice and experienced rancher.

For more information, contact Cleere's Office at (979) 845-6931 or http:/beef.tamu.edu.

2009 FALL BEEF CATTLE WORKSHOP

When.....Thursday August 20, 2009
Where....Helotes 4-H Center,
12132 Leslie Rd., Helotes, TX
Time.....6:00 pm – 9:15 pm

TOPICS

- Resource Conservation & Development Program Update
- Program Overview
- Tax Planning Concepts for Farmers & Ranchers
- Cattle Marketing Cycles for Stockers, Cull Cattle, Replacement Heifers, Etc.

Two (2) CEUs General

Please RSVP by August 18th to Annette at (210) 467-6575

FALL PLANTING KICKOFF!!

Place: Antique Rose Emporium
7561 E. Evans Rd. (210) 651-4565
Date: Wednesday, August 19, 2009
Time: 10 am–3 pm (registration at 9:30am)
Cost: $30 (lunch included)

Topics include - Ants in Your Plants, Irrigation Practices & Rainwater Harvesting, How to Get Kids Involved in Planting and Fall Vegetable Gardens

Three (3) TDA CEU's

For more info, call Annette at (210) 467-6575
Please make check payable to:
Bexar County Agricultural Committee

Mail to: Texas AgriLife Extension Service
Attn: Lawn Management
3355 Cherry Ridge Dr., Suite 212
San Antonio, TX 78230

RANCH ESTATE PLANNING SEMINAR - AUGUST 5 – 6, 2009

This seminar is offered to provide participants enough information on tax and estate planning matters to help them make difficult estate planning decisions.

College Station Conference Center
1300 George Bush Drive
College Station, Texas 77840

Registration Fee: $125 per person includes refreshments, all seminar materials and lunch
If you have any questions, call Connie at (979) 845-2226 or csmotek@tamu.edu

AGRICULTURAL WEBCOURSES AVAILABLE FOR SMALL ACREAGE LANDOWNERS!

The small acreage landowner is a growing segment in Texas agriculture. Per Ag Census statistics, 38% of all farms and ranches in Texas are ranked under 50 acres in size. The small acreage farm or ranch owner may have purchased their small acreage operation for many reasons – retirement, a source of alternate income, or to impart a life-style change. Small scale farmers/ranchers many times have arrived in the enterprise with the need for education concerning enterprise choices, basic production guidelines, as well as advice on marketing strategies and agricultural legalities. One characteristic also typical of small scale farmers/ranchers is that they have hurried schedules in many cases, but are considered very technically astute.

With the growing success of University level distance learning opportunities, the same webcourse access is now provided for adult learners in non-degree seeking courses. The Small Scale Web-Based Program is targeted to small scale farmers/ranchers in need of agricultural courses to address some of the most common small acreage enterprises and problems. The courses are completely asynchronous (can be completed in time available) but at the same time, interactive. The courses will be conducted using the Moodle course management system. The fee for taking the webcourses is a low $50 per course for the introductory courses. Interested small acreage landowners may visit the Small Acreage Landowner Webcourse website at http://grovesite.com/tamu/RI or "myspace" page at http://www.myspace.com/smallfarmprogram for more information on the courses currently available and the course schedules. Registration can be done directly at http://agrilifevents.tamu.edu/. This educational opportunity is being offered through Texas AgriLife Extension Service of the Texas A&M University System. Courses will be added during the 2009 year, so save the link and check back frequently.

WATCH OUT FOR HIGH NITRATE LEVELS IN HAY

Drought has caused some uncommon crops to be baled or grazed or used for livestock forage including corn and sorghum. Nitrate is present to some degree in all forages, however when plants are stressed, normal plant growth does not occur, which may result in plants accumulating too much nitrate. Nitrate poisoning can occur when the forage consumed contains high levels of nitrate, a sudden diet change, conditions causing anemia, or livestock consume supplements of urea or high-protein feeds along with forage containing moderate levels of nitrate.

Many kinds of plants can accumulate nitrate including plants in the sorghum family, like johnsongrass, sudangrasses, sorghum hybrids, corn, small grains, carelessweed or pigweed. Under dry conditions, plant roots continue to absorb small amounts of nitrogen, but the plant has too little water to keep growing, thus nitrate accumulates and is stored in the lower leaves and stems.

To help prevent losses from nitrate poisoning, producers can take the following steps:

• Never turn hungry animals into possibly high nitrate forages. Turning cattle into holding pens or corrals full of manure with pigweed or nightshade species can result in immediate poisoning.

• Turning one old cow into a field to observe is not an effective test for nitrates, because cattle tend to graze the tops of plants first where the concentration is lowest. As they move to the lower plant parts, poisoning could occur.

• Have hay tested before feeding, as nitrate levels remain constant in hay.

• If hay is high in nitrate, feed carefully with an energy supplement or in combination with low-protein forages, or other hay low in nitrates. Never feed high-nitrate hay free choice.

Excessive nitrate consumption can be fatal to cattle. Nitrate concentrations in excess of one percent in the dry matter are considered toxic. However, lower concentrations also can cause health and reproductive problems and impede growth.

Nitrate concentrations less than 0.3 percent are regarded as safe for pregnant cattle and 0.3 percent to 0.5 percent are safe for other cattle. As levels surpass 0.5 percent, the risk of reproductive failure, health problems and reduced performance increases.

QUALITY GRADE – HAS IT REALLY DECLINED?

We're just not producing as much high quality beef as we used to. How many times have you heard that? Texas A&M researchers investigated that idea. In 1960, about 65% graded Choice. In 1987 that was over 90%. In 2005 it was 55%. That is based on the percentage of carcasses submitted for grading. Why was the percent so high in 1987? Prior to that, the grade below Choice was

(Continued)
Good. Consumers had apparently decided that Good wasn't good enough. Retailers found no benefit from selling Good grade beef. Consequently, packers had just about quit having Good carcasses graded; they marketed them under house brands or just sold them ungraded. In 1987 Good was changed to Select, retailers started marketing with that name, so packers submitted more Select carcasses for grading.

A better picture of changes in carcass quality could be obtained by looking at the total amount of beef produced, not just the amount submitted for grading. Using as the base the total amount of beef inspected, Choice made up about 33% in 1960. (That was before large scale commercial feedyards came on the scene, so a much lower percentage of beef came from fed cattle.) In 1987, Choice made up about 50%. In 2005 it was about 46%. So, the authors concluded there is little evidence of declining amounts of Choice beef. Rather, the amount of Select has increased because more beef of that quality is now submitted for grading. (Prof. Anim. Sci. 24:619)

BENEFIT-COST ANALYSIS OF NAIS

USDA-Aphis has released a report on the projected benefits and costs of a National Animal Identification System. Benefits included:

- enhance animal health surveillance and disease eradication
- reduce of economic impact of disease outbreaks
- reduce cattle producers' animal disease testing costs
- maintain export market access
- enhance global market competitiveness
- increase transparency in the supply chain
- improve value-added and certified program efficiency
- enhance animal welfare in response to natural disasters
- reduce risk of unfounded liability claims
- minimize damage to individual producers and industry as a whole.

For the cattle industry, costs were broken out by cow-calf, dairy, stocker, feedlot, auction, and packer. Use of RFID ear tags was assumed. RFID costs per head sold for cow/calf operations ranged from $2.48 for 5,000+ head operations that are currently tagging to $7.17 for less than 50 head operations not currently tagging.

ANTIBIOTICS BILL DEFEATED

A bill that would have limited the use of antibiotics by licensed veterinarians to prevent and control disease in animal agriculture was defeated by the California Senate. 15 Senators voted in favor of the bill and 20 voted against it.

Bill SB416 would have required all school districts in California to make every effort to purchase poultry and meat products that had not been treated with non-therapeutic antibiotics.

The original bill prohibited schools from serving poultry or meat products from animals that had been treated with antibiotics at any time during the life of the animal. Read the entire bill SB416.

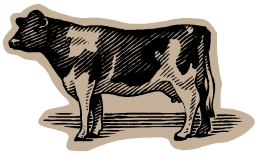
Source: Western United Dairymen

COW-CALF MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

The USDA National Animal Health Monitoring System has reported results for 2007-08. A survey was made of approximately 4000 operations in the 24 states containing 80% of the nation's cow herds and 88% of the cows. Highlights were:

- operations with over 200 cows were more likely to target breed-based marketing
- over 80% of herds kept some records
- veterinarians were considered the most important source for both general and genetic information
- about 2/3 of operations used some form of identification, primarily plastic ear tags
- calf age or weight was the primary factor determining when to wean
- larger operations were more likely to provide calf health information to buyers
- about 1/2 of the operators had heard of the Beef Quality Assurance program
- the majority of operators attending BQA training were either already using BQA practices or implemented them after the training (http://nahms.aphis.usda.gov)

PUBLICATION ON NEW TRICH REGULATIONS



A new Texas AgriLife Extension publication on the trichomoniasis regulations can be accessed at http://animalscience.tamu.edu/images/pdf/beef/beef-summary-new-texas.pdf. The regulations state that a bull "can be certified as virgin **only** if it has **not been commingled with female cattle** and is accompanied by a breeder's certificate." Some confusion has arisen over what constitutes a "breeder's certificate." Dr. Rick Machen, Professor and Extension Livestock Specialist at the Texas AgriLife Center in Uvalde, co-author of the publication linked above, obtained the following clarification of breeder's certificate on May 14 from the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC):

1. A statement that a bull is in fact less than 24 months of age and a virgin.
2. Can be on ranch letterhead, vet clinic letterhead, plain paper, or written on the health papers. TAHC strongly prefers that it be dated and signed by the owner of the bull.

If the owner is not available, TAHC will accept the certifying veterinarians' signature. Does NOT need to be notarized.

3. Should be attached to the health papers.
4. TAHC is developing a form for breeder's to download and use for certification.

Private Applicator Training

When……Thursday, September 3, 2009
Where…...Texas AgriLife Extension Service, 3355 Cherry Ridge Suite 208
Time……..8:30 am – 12:30 pm

The cost is $42.00, which includes the manuals and worksheet. To make a reservation, please call Annette at (210) 467-6575

WILD WONDERINGS BLOG

(http://wild-wonderings.blogspot.com) was created within the Wildlife and Fisheries Extension Unit to reach people in Texas and beyond with information to enhance natural resource management. Given the importance of wildlife and fisheries management in Texas, we hope that articles presented on Wild Wonderings Blog will help provide education to a very large audience.

Natural resource management has grown in popularity and many Texans hunger for wildlife resources and ideas to employ from backyard landscapes to large ranches. Wild Wonderings authors and articles provide timely information and advice on natural resource conservation for those wishing to improve flora and fauna throughout the state. One can expect to find research-based information, management considerations, youth conservation education, links to other helpful web-sites, and current wildlife and fisheries research.

REMOTE-CONTROL HERDING?

The Agricultural Research Service of USDA has granted a license to a Canadian firm interested in marketing a Directional Virtual Fencing system. The system locates cattle by GPS and then sends sounds to an animal. The level of sound can be varied. Sounds can range from "familiar 'gathering songs' sung by cowboys during manual roundups to sirens designed to get cows to move or avoid entering forbidden areas." Animal movement can be tracked by computer. A prototype is being developed with a stereo headset around each ear of the animal. (http://www.ars.usda/gov, downloaded 3/27/09)

THE VALUE OF CARCASS ULTRASOUND IN HEIFERS

The beef trade press has done a tremendous job of polling and listening to bull buyers across the land. Seedstock producers have a much better idea of what will get them to nod their head at an auction than a decade ago. In 2003, a leading livestock publication reported that carcass traits influenced over half (56%) of their readership's bull buying decisions and 3 out of 4 polled were willing to drive up to 499 miles to find their next herd sire. We can argue and guess what those poll questions would produce in 2009, but the fact remains, many bull buyers look at carcass information and are willing to travel to find what they want.

If the poll was repeated today, an entirely new question should be: "Do the carcass attributes of a bull's mother influence your buying decisions?" Most breed associations have or will be moving genetic evaluations from a "sire model" to an "animal model" within the next year. In the most basic terms, this means that EPDs will now be determined by performance and carcass information from the sire and dam, instead of just the sire and maternal grandshire. As a result, collecting ultrasound information on purebred females in the herd has never been more important. Regardless of the size and scope of your operation, carcass ultrasound data from females is currently the "genetic fast lane" to help you reach your end product goals. Fortunately, there are a number of ways to use the information to your herd's benefit.

Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Guidelines recommend that heifers be scanned between 320-410 days of age. However, each breed association is different with many accepting ultrasound data from heifers older than 14 months of age. It's important to schedule heifer scanning within the acceptable window of your breed association(s) and at an appropriate time for your operation.

MULCH, MULCH, & MULCH

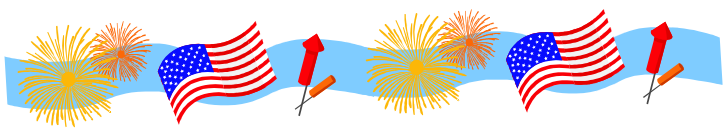
Proper maintenance is a key principle in reducing irrigation requirements in the landscape. Maintenance practices, such as mulching, mowing and fertilizing greatly impact the water efficiency of any landscape, as well as the landscape's ability to survive a drought.

Research at Texas A&M University has shown that un-mulched soil may lose twice as much water to evaporation as mulched soil. Mulch is a layer of material covering the soil surface around plants. Mulches can be organic materials, such as shredded bark, compost and wood chips; or inorganic materials, such as lava rock, limestone and woven plastic.

Use a mulch wherever possible. A good mulch preserves soil moisture, prevents soil compaction, keeps soil temperatures more moderate and reduces weed populations. In case weeds do get a start, they are much easier to pull if a mulch has been used. In addition to mulching, other maintenance practices help save water in the landscape. Raising the mowing height on turfgrasses helps lawns survive drought conditions. For example, raise the mowing height on St. Augustine grass to 3-1/2 to 4 inches during drought. The typical mowing height is 2-2 1/2 inches. However, the taller height promotes a deeper, more water efficient root system. Taller grass acts like a living mulch, shading the ground, thus reducing moisture evaporation from the soil. Also, grass that is allowed to grow taller grows slower; therefore, needing less water and mowing.

Another maintenance practice that adds to the efficient use of water by plants is proper fertilization. Applying fertilizer to the lawn at the proper time and in the proper amount can save time, effort and money through reduced mowing and watering. Fertilizers can also be a major source of pollution of streams and groundwater if excessive amounts are applied.

Fertilize the lawn once in spring and again in fall to produce a beautiful turf without excess growth which demands frequent watering. Use a slow-release form of nitrogen in spring and a quick release form in fall. Apply only one pound of actual nitrogen fertilizer per 1,000 square feet of lawn at one time. By using this fertilizer schedule, no other fertilizer is needed for most shrubs and trees in the lawn area.



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