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## Early Weaning Benefits to Cows

There are terms thrown around that have a different interpretation depending on your situation. “Early” is exactly that in the context of this article and might be a bit late for some producers. Thinking through the value of removing calves earlier than normal and the subsequent value to cow body condition, has merit to discuss regardless of how you might define early. While much of northeast Kansas has been fortunate to receive moisture, parts of the District have cattle producers weathering an exceptionally dry grazing season and many may be considering early weaning calves.

Often discussions about early weaning focus on managing lightweight calves and the subsequent considerations on health and nutrition. Focus here will be on the benefits to the calf factory - the cow. Weaning calves 30-60 days earlier than normal, when calves are four to five months old, is an excellent management tool for producers. This single decision reduces the nutrient requirement of the cow and decreases the daily demand for forage resources, often the most over abused part of the ranching business. How does the math actually work out on this?

At about 90 days of age, calves begin to move from mothers’ milk as primary nutrition to consuming forages as a larger part of the diet. A 450 lb spring-born calf is capable of consuming approximately 7 lbs of forage per day. A dry 1350 lb cow eating 2 percent of her body weight, consumes about 27 lbs of dry forage per day. Divide the 27 lbs the cow consumes by the 7 lbs the calf consumes and that equates to about 4 days of calf forage consumption in a cow day. If calves are weaned 30-60 days early, you can gain an additional 1-2 weeks of forage to support the cow. Not only is there a forage tonnage benefit, but dry cows can generally utilize late season forage more effectively, compared to higher nutrient requirements of a growing calf.

Research at Kansas State University (Bolte et al, 2007) documented that weaning calves at 100 to 145 days of age increased body condition scores of cows grazing native pastures from an average of 5.46 to 5.85 in 120 days. The change in cow body condition score ranged from -0.25 to 0.50 of a condition score (18 to 38 pounds) on this study. These results are more impressive considering that forage quality was likely declining and yet cows were still able to increase body condition. The results of this study demonstrate that the optimum time to improve body condition on cows is immediately following weaning.

Discussion of forage management will be part of the 2022 Tailgate Talk, hosted by Matt and Marley Hamon on Tuesday, September 13, at their farm northwest of Valley Falls. In addition to NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist Dustin Schwandt and Meadowlark Extension District agents David Hallauer and Ross Mosteller, K-State Weed Science Graduate Student Lily Woitaszewski will present her work focused on the impact of pre-plant weed suppression when cover crops are grazed during the winter.

The Jefferson County Conservation District will sponsor a light meal beginning at 5:30 at the farm at 5557 190<sup>th</sup> Rd. northwest of Valley Falls (take K-16 Highway to Swabville Road then head north two and a half miles to 190<sup>th</sup>. Head west on 190<sup>th</sup> one-half mile to the Hamon Farm – watch for signs). Bring a lawn chair and spend the evening hearing some great information to help shore up your fall/winter forage resource.

To help with a meal count, please RSVP by Friday September 9<sup>th</sup> (flyer available at [www.meadowlark.k-state.edu](http://www.meadowlark.k-state.edu)) by calling the Meadowlark Extension District Oskaloosa Office at (785-863-2212) or e-mailing me ([dhallaue@ksu.edu](mailto:dhallaue@ksu.edu)) or Ross Mosteller at [rmostell@ksu.edu](mailto:rmostell@ksu.edu). Hope to see you there!