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Stress Reducing Product at Weaning

Having recently sent two students off to college for the first time as a parent, I now get why the cow bawls at separation time! As we reach the time of year when spring born calves are weaned, questions circulate around how to make the weaning process easier on cow and calf alike. A question that sometimes pops up in the office is about the use of a commercially available product designed to ease this process. In Extension we are not in the business of product endorsement, but a newer product is on the market and creating discussion. I ran across an article by Oklahoma State University livestock area specialist Brian Freking that addresses this topic well, so have chosen to use his article for my submission this week. Good luck with fall weaning.

Have you considered using a product such as maternal bovine appeasing substance (mBAS) aka FerAppease® during weaning. The management key points listed in the bullet list below for fence line weaning have been fairly broadly accepted as a stress minimizing, management technique. Could cows on the opposite side of the fence still provide enough appeasing substance (pheromone) to keep calves calmer? Fence Line Weaning Benefits include the following:

- Calves stand next to fence within eye site and smell of cow
- Process shown to range from 48 to 72 hours
- Normal separation ranges from 7-10 days (old system)
- Calves gradually separate via grazing within 48 hours
- Less vocalization

Scientists have been investigating reducing stress in cattle for decades. Current published information shows promise for the use of mBAS. Journal of Animal Science, 2020, Vol. 98, No. 9, 1-10 provides results from Reinaldo Cooke Texas A&M University providing a detailed project report from this product. Growth rate from day 0 to 28 was greater ($P=0.05$) in mBAS versus control calves (2.21 lb/d vs 1.87 lb/d, respectively; SEM = 0.125) and did not differ ($P=0.23$) from day 28 to 42 between treatments. The key consideration is calves tend to adjust quicker to eating during the stressful first week after weaning. Calves eating routinely coincides with better immunity therefore less of a need for treatment for respiratory complexes. Cortisol concentrations, a biomarker of chronic stress, have been shown to be reduced in calves treated with mBAS.

One common question raised is how long does this product last? The current recommendation is that it will last approximately 14 days. Therefore, utilizing this type of technology would require a precondition period of approximately 45 days to see a return on investment (ROI). As always **Read Label Directions** but currently it calls for a dosage rate in adult cattle to be 5 ml to the Nuchal skin and second 5 ml application to the skin above the muzzle. For calves, apply half the dose on the same locations. There is no slaughter withdrawal period.

Administration of mBAS to beef calves may be a strategy to alleviate some of the physiological and behavioral stress responses elicited by weaning.