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Livestock and Natural Resources

Preconditioning Calves

As the summer grazing season winds down and the time is getting near for cow-calf producers to wean calves, they might be asking themselves, with the prices of many agricultural commodities, can I add some value to my calves by preconditioning my calves or just sell them right off the cow? For starters, what is preconditioning, and why would we do it? Preconditioning is a practice that gets calves ready for the next phase of production and done with proper management can add a few dollars into the cow/calf producer's pocket. In general, these are programs that are done for 30-60 days, with 45 being the most common. During this time, calves are weaned, vaccinated, bunk broke, and water tank broke.

So, how does holding these calves for 45 days actually make the cow/calf producer any money? They have the cost of feeding the calves, vaccinating, yardage, and death loss. Knowing feed cost and price slides are the key factors adding extra dollars through preconditioning. Understanding these factors can also help you make the decision on the possibility of backgrounding longer into the winter or sell the calves outright versus preconditioning. Overall, the goal is to preconditioning is to sell a few more pounds of calf by being able to put on some cheap pounds of gain and add some value to the calf by having an enhanced health status and being on feed.

Buyers are looking for quality calves that are less likely to get sick and perform well in the feed yards. Feedlot operators are often willing to pay a premium for calves that they can add to the yard and have minimal risk associated with them. Numerous University studies of feeder calf prices have identified that buyers are willing to pay premiums for calves that have been through quality preconditioning programs. The key here is to make sure you are proactive in documenting and letting your marketing partner and potential buyers know what you have done with the calves. Building and maintaining a positive reputation and how your calves perform will go a long way in seeing the premium that the preconditioning program can offer.

Here are some key points to take home as you establish your preconditioning program. The first is to remember we are not trying to get these guys on full feed, and we don't want to get them too "fleshy." The goal should be modest and efficient gains. As we go through the weaning process, the transition needs to be smooth, so if you are preconditioning in a dry lot starting the calves on feeds, they are accustomed to, like plenty of long stem grass hay and work grain into the diet over the course of the next week or two. Make sure not increase grain too fast, so you are not getting into issues with acidosis. This means keeping rations that are 50% or less of grains and concentrates on a dry matter basis over the preconditioning period.

Finally, the vaccination programs make sure that you have been proactive in your vaccination and health programs. Consider castration and vaccines before weaning to reduce stress on the calves during weaning, and this makes your vaccination program more effective. Also, time it so that boosters can be given after weaning.

Contact your veterinarian for the vaccination program that will work best for your herd.

David G. Hallauer
District Extension Agent
Crops & Soils/Horticulture

Late Season Soybean Insect Pressure

A recent scouting exercise in the northern part of the District showed about what we expected: not much. Why? Insect pressure has been fairly low for most of the season, and insecticides applied over the last couple of weeks have further kept that pressure at bay.

Will the insecticides last the remainder of the season? I hope so. Most will last at least two weeks – maybe a little longer if sunlight doesn't break them down too quickly. Depending on application timing, that could get us down the road towards maturity, but it's still a good idea to be on the lookout for damaging pests.

Soybeans can typically withstand up to 20 percent foliage loss during pod formation and early fill. After beans are nearly filled, defoliation seldom causes a yield reduction.

Pod feeders are a different story. Stink bugs, bean leaf beetles, and soybean podworm (corn earworm) can cause significant damage to developing pods if insect pressure is high. Even with an insecticide applied, scouting is beneficial. New growth at the top of plants likely wasn't covered during application, plus insecticides do have a limited efficacy length.

What we did find was plenty of defoliated stem borer. There's nothing that can be done for this pest now (control with insecticides is difficult at best), except to plan harvest accordingly. Weakened stems from feeding can result in lodging made worse by windy conditions at maturity.

For descriptions of these pests, see the KSU Soybean Insect Management Guide available from a District Extension Office or online at <https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/mf743.pdf>.

Bur Oak Issues

If you look very closely across our woodlands, it's not uncommon to see a 'bronzing' of some of our bur oaks. In some cases, the bronzing and even thinning of the canopy for this time of year is pretty noticeable.

In many cases, the damage is from multiple sources. Foresters have attributed some of the potential damage to spring cold snaps or even light herbicide injury that occurred earlier in the season. Some species have some disease pressure present as well.

Insect pressure has also been prevalent. Scale insects, lacebugs, and even caterpillars and galls have all been prevalent this summer.

What's the prognosis? It's pretty good, actually. Most of the internal branch tissue on evaluated trees was moist and pliable. Trees are healthy for the most part. We may lose some twigs or even branches, and trees certainly should be monitored in the future, but much of the damage will likely not be long-term in these stands.

If you are interested in seeing what some of the trees look like, check out our Meadowlark Extension District Facebook page for this week's video.

Cindy Williams
Meadowlark Extension District
Food, Nutrition, Health, and Safety

Healthy Fundraising

With schools getting ready to start soon, your child may be asked to participate in a school or youth fundraiser of some sort. This might include some unhealthy food sales. So what's wrong with candy sales?

What message does it send our children when we constantly preach to them about getting more exercise, eating healthy and cutting back on junk food, and then ask them to sell cookie dough and candy bars to friends and family?

Children's lifelong eating habits are greatly influenced by the types of foods and beverages available to them. When less healthy foods are sold "for a good cause," children may think that those foods are a healthful part of a balanced diet. Such misperceptions can contribute to development of poor eating habits. Schools and child care centers encourage healthy eating habits by avoiding fundraisers that rely on the sale of less healthy foods such as candy and cookies.

Here are some of the benefits of healthy fundraising:

*Healthy kids learn better. Research clearly demonstrates that good nutrition is linked to better behavior and academic performance. To provide the best possible learning environment for children, schools, and child care centers must also provide an environment that supports healthy behaviors.

*Provides consistent messages. Fundraising with healthy foods and non-food items demonstrates a commitment to promoting healthy behaviors. It supports the lessons children are learning about health, instead of contradicting them.

*Promotes a healthy school or child care environment. Children need to receive consistent, reliable health information and ample opportunity to use it. Finding healthy fundraising alternatives is an important part of providing a healthy school or child care environment.

Try one of these fundraiser options that have a positive impact on children, families and the community. Here are a few examples to get you started: Walk-a-thon, bike-a-thon, sports camps, garage sale, carnival, car or pet wash, bingo night, gift wrapping services, or "Parents Day Out"-babysitting services.

So what are some health food and beverages items to sell? Low-fat popcorn, fresh fruit and vegetables, fruit baskets, nuts or seeds, trail mix, fruit smoothie mix, frozen bananas, whole wheat pasta and sauce kits, 100% juice, low fat or fat free milk and community dinners.

So for your next fundraising efforts, I hope that you will give some thoughts to the messages that are being sent out to our youth and then making some healthier food choices.

Nancy Nelson
Meadowlark Extension District
Family Life

New Food Label Is A 'Win' For Consumers

K-State Research & Extension nutrition specialist Sandy Procter says recent changes to nutrition labels on most foods should be viewed as a great ally for consumers and their good health.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration initially published rules on changing nutrition information on food labels in 2016, citing the need for those labels to reflect updated scientific information, including the link between diet and such chronic diseases as obesity and heart disease.

Since that time, American food companies have gradually come into compliance. Manufacturers with \$10 million or more in annual sales were required to switch to the new label by January 1 of this year; those with less than \$10 million in annual sales must meet the labeling requirements by January 1, 2021.

The new label not only reflects more of what we know about foods, but also is based on current nutrition and public health research, and the updated dietary guidelines for Americans. Public input was also considered, Procter said.

In addition to larger print, the new label is more clear on the number of calories per serving of any given food and lists information on nutrients considered more vital for overall health.

For example, Procter said, "vitamin D and potassium were never on the label until now. Before, the nutrients highlighted were vitamin A and vitamin C, which are nutrients of concern in other countries, but not in the United States."

Procter said the new labels reflect the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, identifying vitamin D and the mineral potassium as nutrients where most U.S. consumers fall short.

"Vitamin D is activated in the liver and is made by our bodies when we spend a little time out in the sun each day," Procter said. "But vitamin D is limited in food sources."

"Vitamin D is important to boost our auto-immune systems. And it works with calcium to support bone health and bone strength. So, it makes sense for us to look at a food label and determine that a food is a great source of vitamin D."

Potassium, she adds, forms a pump with sodium to keep fluids in balance in and around cells. Eating foods high in potassium helps to offset high levels of sodium, which can contribute to high blood pressure and other disease.

"So, while we are carefully watching our salt intake, we might want to be more interested in sources that are high in potassium," Procter said. "Fruits, vegetables, milk, and other dairy products are good sources of potassium."

The new food labels not only include the quantity of sodium, potassium, and other nutrients in a single serving, but also the percentage one serving contributes to the daily dietary guidelines of a given nutrient – called the Percent Daily Value.

"That information was there before, but you had to invest time and some thought process to find it," Procter said. "Most of us really don't want to do that when it comes to limiting or determining our food intake."

"The new label is user-friendly and contains as much information as most of us would really need when choosing foods," Procter said. "If you are watching your weight or concerned about pre-diabetes, then it's much easier to look at calories and added sugars. Or maybe you've been told to watch your fat and sodium intake because you have high blood pressure; in that case, you may read the label to quickly know how many calories, grams of fat or sodium is in a food."

"We can pick and choose the parts of the label that mean the most to each of us. It's great if you want to read the whole label, but certain parts may be more important and allow us to focus on our personal nutrition needs."