



# ON FEED

A newsletter of Dakotaland Feeds

June 15, 2017

## Managing through Mother Nature

Mother Nature has given us an interesting year in the Dakotas. Much of the area has been in significant need of moisture. Other areas are wet and have had trouble getting crops planted. For the dry areas, this is an exceptionally difficult year. It has been very dry early in the year and so we have already seen a significant loss of forage production. Recent rains have been welcomed and hopefully will continue coming but we need to manage our limited resources the best we can.

If you are in a drought area, our best advice to you is to creep feed early and wean early. By creep feeding the calves when they are young, we teach them how to eat dry feed and we also get the best conversion of additional feed to gain. When we talk about weaning early, we are not talking about a week or two earlier than normal. We can wean calves as early as 100 days of age and get them started on feed. The reason we want to wean early is because it will drop the nutrient requirements of the cow by about 30%. For every 3 days that a calf is weaned, we save 1 day of grazing for the cow. For every pound of creep feed the calves eat, we save about 2/3 lb of forage. In times like this, every pound makes a difference.

When early weaning, making sure the calves can reach the water and feed is very important. Don't just assume that they can reach everything. If you have fenceline bunks, calves might end up sticking both front legs in the bunk to reach the feed if the bunks are too deep. Laying a piece of plywood in the bunk diagonally can help move the feed closer to the front of the bunk and prevent calves from crawling into and then out of the bunk. Supplemental water space may be something you want to consider for early weaning. If calves don't drink, they don't eat and getting them to eat is important for performance and health. Putting an extra tank in the weaning pen could be well worth your time. We generally recommend at least 1 linear inch of drinking space per head and at weaning time, it can be helpful to increase that to 3" to ensure adequate access. That may seem like a lot of drinking space but too many yards are built without adequate water space. If you can pick up additional water intake, you can pick up additional pounds of feed intake and gain.

When starting young calves, keep in mind their protein requirements will be higher than what you normally use. If weaning a 200-300 lb calf, we need to be 18% protein. Many times, orphan beef calves look like they have big hay bellies and no muscle. This is often a problem created by a lack of protein. Creep feed is 14% protein, and while that is adequate for a calf still nursing the cow because of the milk protein they consume, it is not adequate for a weaned calf. Adequate protein makes a big difference in how those calves develop.

Light calves will need to have a slightly drier ration than older calves because their rumen isn't fully developed yet and they don't have the rumen capacity of a 500 lb calf. Dry corn is preferred for starting calves as compared to high moisture corn. Inclusion of corn silage is typically going to be limited in these younger calves also because of the high moisture content and the fermented smell. Generally we want less than 10% of the dry matter as silage in the starter and in the case of light calves, we will need to watch how much we put in closely. For calves

### In a Nutshell

- \*Especially in dry years, creep early and WEAN early
- \*Make sure early-weaned calves can reach feed and water
- \*Early-weaned calves need higher protein and energy
- \*Use Stress Care for Availa-4 trace minerals and watch Ca:P
- \*Consider options for supplementing cows on pasture
- \*Consider if you can split pairs at home and capture the calf value

## MANAGING THROUGH MOTHER NATURE

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300 lbs or so, we need to have a ration that is about 52 Mcal of net energy for gain. We can adjust that down as the calves grow, but that will give us a solid place to start.

Mineral concentrations, particularly calcium and phosphorus need to be monitored in younger calves because younger calves are more susceptible to urinary calculi (water belly). Steer calves are more susceptible than heifers. Regardless, the calcium:phosphorus ratio should be close to 2:1. Trace minerals are critical for the immune system to get up and going, which is very important in early weaned calves. Look for the better sources of zinc, copper, manganese, and cobalt in the Stress Care products to help give the immune system a boost.

When it comes to stretching grass and keeping condition on cows, there are a number of options. Range cubes or cake are available and can help supplement poor quality forage. If you can get distillers delivered to a pasture somehow, either mixed with some other by-products or roughage, you can feed that as a supplement. Supplementation 2-3x per week is acceptable to help supplement intakes. If that is how you want to go about supplementation, then you still need to deliver the same number of pounds as you would if feeding daily. Or you can look at supplementing Accuration blocks or Accuration/Ration Manager blends in a self-feeder. These are more expensive options, but we can hold intakes on higher Accuration blends (for example 70% Ration Manager and 30% corn). This will allow us to hold body condition and hopefully keep cows in shape during breeding season. In the event that we get more rain and the grass comes back, you can stop the supplementation.

Drylot feeding or having cows custom fed in a drylot are also options. In many instances, this is going to be a less expensive way to go if you are hauling the cows to an area out of the drought. Feeding through a drought can be really expensive but if you want to hold your cow herd together, you have to be willing to do things differently than what you would normally do.

Right now, anything you can do to get a calf weaned and on feed is going to pay. The price of pairs that are going to be split is not attractive. So split the pair at home, get the calf eating and vaccinated and capture the value from your calf at the very least. There are ways to do this and make it work. Many feedlots don't have the experience of weaning calves that cow-calf producers have and so there is a big learning curve (and discount) to attract anyone to want to try it. That also means there is big opportunity to be seized if you are willing to do it.

One thing to consider for the future is that if you plan on grazing and having a cow-calf herd, you may want to consider having yearlings to put on grass also. That way, when things start to get dry, you have animals that you can easily sell without cutting into the heart of your cow herd immediately. Dry times put a tremendous amount of stress on everyone and the best thing we can do is to make a drought strategy when times are good because we know it will get dry again sometime. That will make it easier for us to execute our plan without panic. And, we will also likely get wet again someday too.

*Roxanne Kneek, PhD*

### **Things to be thinking about:**

- \*Get your creep feeders in shape to put out in pastures and **get creep feed out for spring-born calves**
- \* Keep mineral in place for the cows on pasture
- \*Feed **Altosid** to control horn fly populations
- \*Implant calves at branding time
- \*Get prepared for heat stress for cattle in the lots- shades, sprinklers, extra water tanks, etc.
- \* Order wasps for feedlot fly control or ask about **Clarify** for feed-through fly control in the feedlot
- \* Make sure the bulls have mineral too! Stress Tubs or Ultimate Breeder mineral provide the Availa-4 mineral
- \* Have a breeding soundness exam and semen test done on your bulls to help ensure high pregnancy rates