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Ag Dollars and Sense

Ag Newsletter
Gregg County
HUGH SOAPE, CEA-AGNR
November and December 2012

CEU Opportunities

The last **"Third Thursday Breakfast and a CEU'" program for 2012 will be held 7:00-8:00 AM, on November 15th at The Butcher Shop**. The December meeting will not be held as it falls during the Christmas season. 2013 begins a new series, and I need input from our producers who have a private pesticide applicators license as to whether this is a worthwhile program to be continued next year. Attendance dropped significantly when I was required to charge the $10 Cost Recovery Fee. Although $10 for up-to 10 or 12 hours CEU credits is a lot less than many other options for gaining the required 15 CEU's over a 5 year period, it may not be what you want. I encourage you to let me know if you want to continue this program. If so, are there other times/places you prefer to meet?

December 11, 2012 provides the opportunity to receive **5 CEU's at the Texas A&M AgriLife Center in Overton.** CEU's will include 1 in Laws and Regulations, 1 in Integrated Pest Management (IPM), and 3 in the General category. Topics will include: Herbicide Update, Wild Pig Status and Control Update, External Parasite Control- Beef Cattle, Ornamental Plant Research update and Grasshopper and Armyworm Management. Registration is $30 at the door with lunch and break provided.

The Texas A&M AgriLife Center in Overton will offer another 5 CEU's with the same breakdown in categories **on December 13th**. Topics will be the same with exception of West Nile Virus and Other Urban Insect Issues and Controlling Nuisance Wildlife (Vultures, Beavers & Coyotes) replacing Wild Pig Status and Control Update, External Parasite Control- Beef Cattle. Registration is $30 at the door only with lunch and break provided.

Also, we will hold our **2013 Annual Multi-County Pesticide Credit Hour Program on January 25, 2013 at the Harrison County Extension Office, Marshall, Texas.** You will have the opportunity to receive **6.5 hours CEU's** with topics including: Management of Recovering Forages in East Texas, Aquatic Weed Management Updates, New TAHC Cattle Traceability Rule, Herbicide Use in Timber Management, Internal and External Parasites of Beef Cattle, Pasture Weed Control Updates, and Pesticide License Management (Keeping up with it). Registration is $30 includes lunch and refreshment breaks. Registration will begin at 8:30 AM and the program will conclude at 3:30 PM. Participation is limited to the first 50 that register for this program. Call the Harrison County Extension Office to register (903-935-8413).

USDA Informational Meeting for Hispanic & Women Farmers & Ranchers

The USDA Texas Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Rural Development (RD) will attend a public meeting hosted by Texas Small Farmers and Ranchers CBO. The meeting will include updates on current USDA programs as well as discussion of the Hispanic and Women Farmer and Rancher Claims Process. **The Claims period opened on September 24, 2012 and will close on March 25, 2013.**

The meeting will be held Thursday, November 15 at 6:00 PM at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service auditorium, 405 E. Marshall St., Longview, TX 75601. If you, or someone you know, believe the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has improperly denied you farm loan benefits between 1981 and 2000 because you are Hispanic or female, you may be eligible to apply for compensation and should attend this scheduled public meeting.

For additional information, or if you are a person with a disability who requires accommodations to attend or participate in this meeting, contact Raymond Lopez at (817) 573-14444 ext. 104, or raymond.lopez@tx.usda.gov or Federal Relay Service at 1-866-377-8642.

Hay Show Results are Good!

The First Annual Gregg County Hay Show received good participation and good results even though it was announced on short notice. We had a total of 17 entries with 4 in the open category. Crude Protein (CP) ranged from a low of 6.5 to 16.56, and projected Average Daily Gains for a 500 lb yearling ranged from -0.04 to 1.34.

Mr. Ross Kinney received the Grand Champion Belt buckle (sponsored by A&M Farm Supply) with his Tifton-85 sample that had 15.29% Crude Protein, 62.67 TDN, 75.88 Relative Feed Value (RFV), and a projected 1.05 Average Daily Gain (ADG) for a 500 lb yearling.

Mr. Carlos Griffin received the Reserve Champion Buckle (sponsored by Jakes' Feed Store) with his Tifton-85 sample that had 12.77 CP, 75.01 RFV, and 0.75 AGD.

Mr. Ronnie McKinney earned the "People's Choice" Award (visual selection by attendees) with his good-looking entry of 11.05 CP, 66.04 RFV, and 0.44 ADG hay.

In the Open Division for hay produced outside of Gregg County, Mr. Myron Halbert took the Grand Champion Open buckle sponsored by Longview Equipment Company with his hay that tested 16.56 CP, 66.11 TDN, 80.76 RFV and 1.34 ADG.

And C&B Feed earned the Reserve Champion Open buckle sponsored by East Texas Seed Company of Tyler.

Over all we had 5 Blue Ribbon quality entries testing 10% CP or above, 7 Red Ribbon quality entries testing between 8 and 10% CP, and 1 White Ribbon quality entry that tested below 8% CP.

All producers are encouraged to have their hay tested to determine its feed value and help them decide if they need to supplement it and if so what kind of supplement they need to use.

New Animal Traceability Rule

A requirement for adult cattle in Texas to have an approved form of permanent identification in place at change of ownership will go into effect January 1, 2013 according to the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC). The Commission amended its rules in June, 2012 to enhance the effective traceability of beef cattle movements in Texas. The amended rule permanently cancels the brucellosis test requirement for adult cattle at change of ownership, which was unofficially suspended in the summer of 2011. Although testing of adult cattle is no longer

required with the rule change, all sexually intact cattle 18 months of age or older changing ownership must still be officially identified with Commission approved permanent identification. TAHC routinely performs cattle health investigations where the identification and location of exposed/infected animals is critical to success. The new traceability rule will help preserve the TAHC's ability to identify and trace animal movements quickly and effectively, no matter which disease is involved.

A complete list of acceptable identification devices/methods may be found at www.tahc.state.tx.us, but the most commonly used devices include USDA metal tags, brucellosis calfhood vaccination tags, US origin 840 series Radio Frequency identification tags (RFID), and breed registration tattoos or firebrands. Producers are encouraged to contact their veterinarian or TAHC to determine which method of tagging will be best for their operation.

Free USDA metal tags, and a limited number of free applicator pliers (dependent on available funding) will be provided by the TAHC to producers wishing to use them. The tags and/or pliers may be obtained by contacting local TAHC field staff and USDA APHIS Veterinary Services representatives. Producers may locate the closest tag distributor online at www.tahc.state.tx.us.

Please note this is a Texas rule, not federal. It will put the beef industry in compliance with the anticipated USDA Animal Disease Traceability rule for interstate movement expected to be released later this year. Also, producers can move an animal directly to slaughter from their premise without an ID. Breeding cattle otherwise changing ownership by private treaty (county sales) must have acceptable identification. Record keeping by producers is not required, but is strongly encouraged. All official identification numbers assigned will be maintained in a TAHC-managed database. TACH will not track individual change of ownership transactions.

For additional ear tag information, including the nearest distributor of free USDA tags, contact the TAHC Traceability Team at 1-800-550-8242 ext. 733, or visit www.tahc.state.tx.us.

Pregnancy Evaluation is a Key Management Tool

Next year's planning is under way. Eighty-four percent of the cows are projected to calf in the first 21 days of the calving season next spring. This means that the cows cycled and the bulls got them bred. All the hard work that goes into developing a functional and environmentally fit cow herd is acknowledged in the fall with pregnant cows.

As calves are weaned, each group of cows is pregnancy tested. Typically, 61 percent of mature cows tend to calve within the first 21 days of the calving period. Almost 86 percent tend to calve within 42 days of the start of calving season. Calves are typically scheduled to be weaned in late-September to early-October.

Cattle love the fall of the year. The summer heat is gone and there is a sense that winter preparation needs to get under way. Of course, for the cow that simply means eating more. The calves are maturing and milk production is decreasing, so those extra bites are quickly converted to some good winter cover, which commonly is called fat. Leanness is good, except for now, because that extra fat cover can mitigate some cold winter days.

Good managers understand that now is the time to start getting the cows in shape for next year. In the case of pregnant cows, now is the time to get them ready to calve next season. The point being, this time of year, if forage is available, cows literally know they need to take advantage of good weather and feed in preparation for winter. As part of standard management practices, pregnancy status should be determined in all the cows to avoid feeding open cows high-priced feed.

By pregnancy testing, a predicted calving date is established. By knowing these dates, a producer can target high-priced hay appropriately and avoid feeding cows that will not return as many dollars next year. If one needs to further reduce cow numbers, select cows to keep that are going to calve during the desired calving time rather than late. Granted, for early calves, such as

those born in December, the cows are starting their last third of their gestation, so very little can be done.

However, for the more typical late calving herds, October is a good time to sort and cull cows. There is nothing better than to have one eye on the cow in the chute during the pregnancy examination and one eye on the hay pile. If that hay pile is small, the later the cow is bred, the more likely that she should go to the bred cow sale. Cows that are not adapted are noted as they go through the chutes at weaning. Making exceptions for open cows is not a wise managerial thought.

There is always a good feeling when cows test pregnant. All the hard work that goes into developing a functional and environmentally fit cow herd is acknowledged in the fall with pregnant cows.

Winter Cow Management Following Drought

The return of an El Nino weather pattern this winter brings hope for the end of drought conditions, the U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook suggests the drought will persist or intensify in some areas. The following management practices should help you prepare for the winter feeding season.

Sell all open cows! Early identification and removal of open cows should be top priority. It is not economical to maintain these females. Annual cow costs averaged about $450 per head in 2011, and will likely be higher this winter. A cow that does not produce a calf in 2013 will not overcome that expense. You can use the income from selling open cows to replace them with young females bred to calve when you want. It will take about two open cows to purchase one bred female. If you are in a real tight for winter feeding, consider further culling based on a logical culling protocol. *Guidelines for Culling Cows* at: www.noble.org/ag/livestock/cullingcows contains good guidelines.

Evaluate feeding programs and associated costs. A dry cow being fed 5% crude protein (CP) hay requires 3 lbs per day or 20% cubes at $370/ton, 3.1 lbs/day of alfalfa hay at $240/ton, or 2.5 lbs/d of soybean hulls (SBH) and bagged corn gluten feed (CGR) (50-50 mix)at $320/ton; while the same cow eating 8%CP hay requires no supplementation. With both types of hay valued at $120/ton, the savings of knowing the quality of the hay you are feeding can mean a savings of between $150 and $215 per cow over a 120 day winter feeding season. This clearly shows the value of forage testing the hay you are feeding regardless of whether you grew it yourself, or purchased it.

Substitute winter pasture. Winter pasture costs are estimated to be $40/ton of dry matter, assuming a per-acre establishment cost of $160 and a 4-ton forage yield making winter pastures a very viable substitute for hay and supplement this winter. However, be alert for several possible problems that could arise. ***Bloat*** is the first potential problem. Bloat preventatives such as poloxalene blocks add to the winter feed costs. The second is "***dietary scours***" that can appear when the forage is lush and actively growing and the non-lactating cow consumes much more crude protein than she needs on a total quantity basis. Allowing cows to have access to a roughage source such as low quality hay or standing grass may help this situation. Thirdly, cows grazing winter pasture through calving may require high magnesium mineral to help prevent ***grass tetany*** increasing her wintering costs. The costs per cow of full-time grazing winter pastures includes one round bale per cow ($50)and a high magnesium mineral ($22) for the 120-day wintering season.

Reduce hay waste. Some folks prefer using hay rings. I personally don't use them. Any practice that will reduce wasted hay will reduce the winter feed bill. Keeping the hay "high and dry" while in storage reduces mold and waste due to refusal to consume the outer portion of the hay roll. If

you are feeding alfalfa hay as a protein supplement, then feed the alfalfa hay on top of the roll of grass hay they just finished to encourage the cows to clean up more of the grass hay as they search for any shattered leaves from the alfalfa hay fed on top of it. Also, moving the hay to a new site each time you feed it will move the organic matter and manure (nutrients) to a new location that will help fertilize the field for next summer. Feeding the hay on bare spots in the pasture will add organic matter to the soil and encourage grass to grow there next season. By doing this, even the "wasted" hay has value as a slow-release fertilizer.

With feed costs continuing to rise, it is imperative to evaluate all feeding options. If our fall weather cooperates, winter pastures can provide the much needed protein and dry matter for the cows during the winter. In any case, only productive/bred cows should be maintained through the winter.

Get Your Replacement Heifers Off to a Good Start

There aren't many sights more satisfying than that of a first-calf heifer's newborn calf standing up and nursing. You can increase the odds of that happening by starting early in the heifer's life. Here are a few tips for successfully calving out a heifer, starting at her own weaning.

Selection:

Look at her mama. If she has successfully raised calves without problems, it is an indication her daughter(s) will too. I like to select replacement who were born early in the calving season. They will normally be bigger than their contemporaries, should reach puberty sooner and are more likely to become pregnant during their first breeding season. Since they start out ahead, they should be bigger and more grownup when they calve.

Palpating heifers is a good idea. Not so much for pelvic measurements or to do a formal reproductive tract score, but it gives us a chance to eliminate any heifers with really small pelvises or abnormal or irregularly-shaped ones. It also helps us identify "free martins" and the ones not cycling.

Sire selection is important in keeping birth weights down. Also, go over the heifer's total conformation to be sure she is sound. Look at her feet, legs and udder. I like a moderate-framed heifer that is nutritionally efficient as well as reproductively efficient. Don't forget her disposition. If she has a "crazy" nature, she will keep the others stirred up be a pain to work.

Development:

We used to think heifers had to have 65% of their mature body weight to breed them. There has been some research that says we can get acceptable pregnancy rates at 55-60%. This gives good breeding results with reduced development costs. However, this is dependent on the overall fertility of the herd, breed type and the overall nutrition program of the operation as well as the producer's goals.

Replacement heifer's average daily gains of a little less than 2.0 from selection to breeding should be adequate. They need to be in a Body Condition Score (BCS) of 6.0 at calving to produce good quality colostrums, have a healthy calf, and be more likely to cycle sooner.

Deworming and Vaccinations:

It is very important to get the parasites out of them. In some studies, deworming has hastened puberty. For vaccinations, Modified Live Viral (MLV) vaccines are my choice. IBR and BVD are reproductive diseases as well as respiratory diseases. I also include vibro and lepto in my vaccination schedules. When they are ready to calve, give a seven-way clostridial vaccine. That could enhance their colostrums.

If they have had at least two MLV vaccinations prior to breeding, I am comfortable giving a booster before calving. **WARNING: if you use an MLV when the animal is pregnant, stay with the same product you used before!** There are differences between products, and I have been told of abortion storms with fall vaccinations. Consult your veterinarian and the technical services vet with the pharmaceutical company before switching products.

Calving Watch:

Check your heifers often during the calving season. It is recommended every 4 hours if possible. If one is showing signs of calving, check her every 2 hours. Once she starts the process, check every 15 minutes as heifers don't take breaks in the calving process like cows and can kill their calves trying to push the fetus out. The constant pressure pushes blood and body fluids to the head, and circulation to the brain is virtually stopped and the calf can lose consciousness. An unconscious calf can't take the first breath it needs, so lack of respiration is what actually kills the calf. The same thing can happen during a difficult labor. These calves are usually accompanied by a swollen head/tongue/throat, and are referred to as "dummy calves" as they can't function normally. Most can and will pull out of it, but it takes them a while to catch up.

Because of the potential for trouble when heifers are calving, it pays to keep a close eye on them.

Bull management in multi-sire pastures

Before the fall breeding season begins, a few simple management procedures involving the bulls can increase the likelihood of a high pregnancy percentage among the cows.

1) In multi-sire breeding pastures, make certain that the bulls that will be pastured together have been in a common trap or pasture prior to the breeding season. Bulls WILL establish a social hierarchy. They will fight to find out who is "king of the mountain". It is better to get this done before the breeding season begins, rather than wait until they are first placed with the cows.

2) Put young bulls with young bulls, and mature bulls with mature bulls. Mixing the ages will result in the mature bull dominating the younger bull completely, and in some instances causing a serious injury. If the plan is to rotate bulls during the breeding season, then use the mature bulls first, and follow with the yearling bulls in the last third of the breeding season. In this way, the young bulls will have fewer cows to breed, and will be 1 – 2 months older when they start breeding.

3) Breeding soundness exams will be a cost-effective way to help weed out those bulls that may be dominant in the bull pasture, but due to poor semen quality, could cause a lowered pregnancy rate or elongated calving season next fall. Visit with your local large animal veterinarian about testing the bulls soon, so that if replacements are necessary, there is enough time and opportunity before the fall breeding season is to begin. If the bulls need to have the feet trimmed, now would be the time to have them trimmed so that the feet will not be sore during the first week of the breeding season. Also, be certain to ask your veterinarian about the need to test the bulls for the reproductive disease, trichomoniasis.

Managing for Forage Quality: A Key to Forage Profitability

In a grazing system, the practical measurement of forage quality is animal performance. When the quality of the grazed forage is high, not only the forage nutritive value is high, but also the intake of that forage is high. The result is expected high rates of gain, abundant milk production or efficient reproduction – in cowboy terms, pounds on the scale, milk in the bucket, calves on the ground. The issue is how can the manager be profitable, keep a pasture with the highest forage nutritive value and obtain the maximum intake by livestock?

To answer this question, examine the main factors that affect forage quality to guide the manager's decisions. There are many factors affecting quality, but the primary are forage type, maturity, season and forage fertility and management.

1. **Forage type (grasses or legumes, cool-season or warm-season or combinations):** When it comes to nutritive value, not all forage species are created equal. Legumes generally have higher nutritive value than grasses and cool-season forages are higher than warm-season ones. For example, some values of crude protein include: alfalfa at 18 to 25 percent, corn leaves at 6-14% and coastal bermudagrass leaves at 4-18 percent. Legumes have higher crude protein concentrations and higher intake by livestock because of the higher percentage of rapidly digestible leaves. However, total digestible nutrients or TDN concentration of legumes and cool-season grasses are similar.

   Cool-season grasses such as rye and ryegrass often have higher quality than warm-season (tropical) grasses such as bermudagrass and bahiagrass. There is a lot of variation in forage quality within and among grass genera that making a decision on which type of forage or variety to plant sets the forage quality ceiling to be reached. Because legumes are high in protein, they are usually recommended as companion forages over-seeded into existing pastures. There is a limitation in terms of quality if the forage or variety planted naturally has low nutritive value and does not have the potential to achieve high digestibility or accumulate protein in the leaf tissue.

2. **Maturity** is the most important factor affecting forage quality. It refers to how forages change over time. Maturity is the stage of regrowth at the time of utilization and is determined by the number of days the pasture has been resting prior to grazing. For haying, it is the number of days between harvests. For example, a grass grazed after two weeks of resting is relatively immature, high in moisture and made up mostly of leaves with high crude protein and digestibility and no fibrous components, and cattle eat it readily. Whereas a grass grazed after two months of resting is very mature, with low moisture, low leaf-to-stem ratio, and cattle eat it only if they need to. Although cattle may consume this old material, it requires more time in the rumen to be digested by the rumen microbes.

   Forage quality begins to decline as soon as they start to regrow due to the accumulation of stems and engrossing of the cell walls with poorly digested lignin. Legume and cool-season grass maturity can be assessed by determining the reproductive stage they are in. If the plant is flowering, the forage is in a mature stage. For warm-season grasses, the weeks of regrowth are a better indicator of maturity than the reproductive phase because flowering may begin shortly after regrowth begins. For perennial grasses, the most dramatic difference in maturity is the decrease in voluntary intake that occurs when forage regrowth is between six and eight weeks old.

3. **Season** effects forage quality, resulting in a "summer slump" in forage nutritive value and animal gains when compared to the spring and fall. Higher temperatures and the associated

increase in lignin deposition, together with increased growth rates are linked to the decline in digestibility and reduced intake.

4. **Fertilization and Management:** If forage CP is low in unfertilized grass, then N fertilizer application will often increase forage CP and contribute to improved forage intake and animal performance. Although nitrogen fertilization greatly affects grass yield and usually increases crude protein, it has little affect on digestibility.

   Fertilization is used to modify quality in an indirect manner. By increasing the yield of pastures, they can be stocked at a conservative rate and stubble height to allow the grass to persist and be ready to be grazed at a relatively immature stage.

Recapping, there are several factors affecting forage quality, but the most important is maturity. At a very mature stage, the nutritive value of the forage will be low regardless of the forage type. Even the best forages will be low-quality if used at a very mature stage. The key to success is the use of an adapted grass and production managed under a weekly grazing rotation onto pastures that have rested for 14 to 21 days that provide leafy, immature grass of high nutritive value.

Weekly Texas Hay Report

Whether you are buying or selling hay, the Weekly Texas Hay Report put out each Friday by the USDA Market News gives the latest on hay market activity and is a good guide for pricing hay. The website is http://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/am_gr310.txt. This report breaks Texas into the following regions: Panhandle/High Plains; Far West Texas/Trans Pecos; North, Central, and East Texas; and South Texas. Pricing is based on quality factors with prices quoted as per ton except where noted otherwise. It also gives a table for Alfalfa guidelines and one for Grass hay guidelines. This site also has a link to the Texas Hay Hotline if you are looking to purchase hay. The Texas Hay Hotline site is www.TexasAgriculture.gov/hayhotline.

Agriculture Needs a Transfusion of Youth

With so many farmers nearing retirement (many have left production agriculture due to the recent drought) the question looms, who will farm the land in the future? A recent USDA survey forewarns of an impending crisis in agriculture. The survey showed only 5 percent of principal farm operators nationwide are under the age of 35, with one-third of U.S. farmers now age 65 or older.

It's not about too many rules and regulations restricting farm profitability, inadequate farm policy or rising input costs, although these factors could well play into the crisis. It's not about land, or water, or conservation. There are plenty of rules in place to preserve these resources.

Little has been done however, to encourage the next generation of farmers to step in and provide society's food, feed, fuel and fiber. With so many U.S. farmers so close to retirement, and a generation of young people less inclined to follow their parent's footsteps, one wonders, who will be farming the land in 2025, a scant 13 years from now?

Kevin Moore, an associate professor at the University of Missouri is addressing this potential shortage of knowledge and skill in a class called "Returning to the Farm" which prepares students to overcome the financial and personality hurdles of becoming a farmer. He says "the purpose of the class is to teach students the skills they will need to overcome the financial and societal pressures they will face when going back to the family farm or starting their own farms." The class focuses on subjects such as financial planning, developing business plans and features visits from farmers and professors who cover topics related to estate planning, business organization

and tax management. Moore says "the class helps students prepare to face the first five years of business so they can be successful in the farming industry."

Many young people today are more attracted to what they see as more lucrative, non-farming careers and an urban lifestyle. Public perception of agriculture has fallen in recent years, adding to the pressure to seek employment elsewhere.

Parents often wait too long to discuss their children's goals. To often assumptions are made about the next generation coming back to the farm. Leaving a lot of planning and decisions for later creates a crunch-time when the children have already made decisions about the direction of their lives.

If younger adults continue to choose to not go into the farming industry, we may run into a problem within the next decade or two due to the lack of farmers in the United States.

GrandPa's Words of Wisdom:

Don't skinny dip with snapping turtles.
The shallower the stream the louder the babble.
Meanness don't happen overnight.
Words that soak into your ears are whispered, not yelled.

Until next time-
Wear a tall hat,
Ride a fast Shetland
And hope no one shoots low

Happy Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas
and Happy New Year

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