



Regional Beef Notes

Fall 2017

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Minimizing Calving Difficulty

Jessica Morgan, Agriculture Agent, Anson County

At this point of the year, calves are starting to drop and will continue through the fall. A lot of the factors that influence calving difficulty can't be changed now, but it's a good time to look at these factors, (especially if you're having a hard go), and see where improvements can be made for future calf crops.

- **Age of Dam:** First-calf heifers account for the majority of calving difficulty and subsequent losses. High rates of dystocia among first calf heifers and young cows are due to the fact that are physically smaller at first parturition than later in life. So, always assume that first calf heifers will have problems, check on them frequently during the calving season, and make sure they are large enough when bred to handle a calf, shooting for 65% of mature weight at 14 months of age or 850 lbs for a 1300 lb mature cow.
- **Calf Birth Weight**– This is not a recommendation to have smaller and smaller calves so you never have to pull a calf. I repeat, do not decrease your calf size to a point where performance of the calf is jeopardized, just so you don't have to pull any. In normal cow herds, you will always have a few calves to be pulled. Since birth weight is highly correlated to growth traits, a producer may strive to "challenge" their cows by choosing matings that will result in birth weights that require a few pulls. This is a balancing act between calving difficulties and maximizing calf performance.
- **Dams Pelvic Areas**– Pelvic area has seen more attention lately as a trait related to dystocia, even though not all folks agree on the importance of this trait. A South Dakota State University study showed that calving difficulty is more than twice as likely in heifers with below average pelvic areas, compared to above average. Females with very small pelvises that carry large calves will experience difficulty, every time. Females with large pelvises, that have small calves will have very low, (but not zero!) incidences of calving difficulty. Producers should select against small pelvises, since it is a highly heritable trait. Unfortunately, pelvis size cannot be determined by an external visual appraisal. Large framed cattle do not automatically have large pelvis size.
- **Pre-Calving Nutrition and Condition of the Dam**– Some cattle producers think that by limiting feed prior to calving will reduce calf birth weight and therefore calving problems. Research has shown that while birth weight can be reduced, calving difficulty is actually increased in underfed cows with lighter calves. Since underfeeding cows prior to calving will also delay return to estrus and should be avoided. Cows, especially need energy to expend a calf, however too much condition can hinder an animals ability to naturally give birth and should be avoided as well.
- **Abnormal Presentation or Delivery**– Most calves are presented correctly, with the front feet first and the nose resting on the front legs. Occasionally, the calf will be backwards, breech (butt first) head to one side or the other, or have one or both front legs back or a knee bent. These typically require some sort of assistance. Check to see if the problem can be easily remedied , or need some work from a veterinarian.

The simplest way to avoid high incidence of calving problems is not to calve any first calf heifers, purchasing only mature replacement females which is really not feasible. Replacement heifers should be fed to grow and develop fast enough to cycle and become pregnant and calve by 24 months. Consider both genetics and management in attempts to reduce calving issues. Mate heifers so that they calve earlier in the season, so they can get extra attention, and feed cows properly to meet nutrient requirements. Consider Birth Weight EPD in bull selection as well as Calving Ease, and remember that all breeds are not created equal. *(continued page 2)*

**NC COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION**



2017 Feeder Calf Sale Program

NC Cooperative Extension would like to thank all our farmers who participated in the 2017 Feeder Calf Sale Program!

We will be holding a wrap up meeting for the 2017 Feeder Calf Sale Program at the Stanly County Agri-Civic Center on Thursday, November 30th, time TBD for farmers who participated in the program for 2017. We will discuss sale prices, the quality of calves, and what improvements can be made for next year. Look for more information closer to the date. For any questions about this meeting, please contact Jessica Morgan at 704.694.2415.

Minimizing Calving Difficulty (continued)

Jessica Morgan, Agriculture Agent, Anson County

General recommendations to reduce calving difficulties include:

- Mate heifers and small cows to bulls that will sire smaller calves. Consider breed, Birth Weight EPD, Calving Ease EPD, actual birth weight and physical structure of the bull when making mating decisions.
- Feed heifers well enough to weigh at least 85% of their expected mature weight at first calving. Don't get them bred and then forget about their development.
- If calving difficulty is a problem in your herd, measure pelvic area in replacement heifers and cull those that are too small. Required size will differ from one breed to another but in general heifers from medium sized breeds should have pelvises of a least 160 square cms at breeding.
- Do not retain daughters of cows that have a record of calving difficulty.
- Begin breeding heifers 21 to 30 days earlier than cows so that they can be observed more at calving time. Feed the herd late in the day during calving season so that more will calve in daylight.
- Record a calving ease score for all calves that are observed at birth. If calving ease or difficulty changes over time, consider issues and manage properly.

Anderson, Pete. 2012. "Minimizing Calving difficulty in Beef Cattle. University of Minnesota Extension.

Pasture Reseeding and Fertility

Jessica Morgan, Agriculture Agent, Anson County

It's that time of the year to put some thought and some TLC to our pastures. Many of them, even hardy stands of old fescue, are looking a little rough after the drought conditions over the past two years and this is the perfect opportunity to put some love back in them.

- **Check Fertility.** The only way to know if pastures have the appropriate levels of nutrients to sustain a grass crop is through soil sampling. Soil sampling through the NCDA lab is free until November, and should be taken advantage of. Take soil samples randomly, in a zig-zag pattern across a field. Combine in a clean bucket and fill the brown cardboard box to the red line as indicated. Boxes and forms can be found at your local Extension office. Agents can assist with how to fill out the forms for appropriate results and help with interpreting the results when they come back. It is imperative that you do this quickly, as fertilizer and lime need to be applied early in this cool season growing season. While calf prices have been down lately, they are still up from a decade ago. A ton of lime, if needed, on a pasture will pay for itself in a year and keep nourishing your forages for 3-5 years.

Reseeding Pastures. Forage Species and Establishment. Cool season grasses can be planted through most of the fall in the Piedmont of NC. Consider looking into endophyte friendly or endophyte free tall fescue species. The endophyte present in traditional Kentucky 31 species of fescue is known to cause increased heat stress in cattle, something that we don't need in NC. Look for varieties like MaxQ, BarOptima, and Cajun II. They are more expensive, but worth it for the increased performance from your cows and calves. Drill fescue at 15-20 lbs/A or broadcast 20-25 lbs/A through October. If pastures are just a little beat up in spots, consider interseeding orchardgrass, at 5-10 lbs/A, or clover species at 2-3lbs/A to fill gaps and add some nutrition to fescue stands.

-**Reseeding Pastures. Considerations.** Competition from weeds can be a downfall of many stand failures. Suppress weeds by mowing or grazing heavily beforehand to help control weeds. Herbicide control is not recommended on newly established pastures because the seedlings are generally very sensitive. Fertilization, timely mowing and good grazing management will help reduce weed infestations, as the best weed control is thick, healthy grass. Avoid grazing as long as possible, preferably through spring growth. Avoid grazing when wet and muddy, as animal hooves can severely damage young growth. Overgrazing, especially young stands, can be detrimental to the health of the plant. Continual grazing does not allow the plants to grow a healthy and strong root system, leaving them more susceptible to stressors such as heat and drought. Proper management of newly established pastures will promote healthy plant growth resulting in a vigorous, long, and productive stand.

The Fuss About Fescue

Samantha Foster, Extension Agent, Agriculture, Stanly County Center

If you spend much time talking about cattle raised in the Southeast, you will eventually hear the phrase “fescue toxicosis.” This essentially is describing a cluster of issues that can arise in cattle grazing tall fescue that is infected with a type of fungus that produces ergot alkaloids. This fungus, called an endophyte, benefits the plant by helping it to be hardier, but the effects of ingesting grass containing these toxins can result in real issues for our cattle. Among these include increased body temperature (and a predisposition to heat- stress related issues), unthrifty appearance, rough hair coat, and decreased reproductive performance, milk production, and feed intake. Infected plants look the same as non-infected plants. To detect infection, it is necessary to have plants tested in a lab. However, it is estimated that approximately 85% of tall fescue is infected.

Because a cattle producer’s profit can be determined by how many pounds of calf is weaned per cow, losses in reproductive efficiency and calf gains can make a major impact to their bottom line. Producers who graze tall fescue can take certain steps to mitigate toxicity issues without completely renovating an entire field. This can include providing ample shade and water during the warmer months as well as incorporating clover in a fescue pasture to help dilute the amount of toxins that cattle are consuming. Heavy nitrogen fertilizer applications may elevate toxicity problems, so fertilization of fescue should be managed with care.

Rotational grazing can be a useful tool in mitigating fescue toxicity. More mature plants tend to be more toxic, especially once seed heads have developed. Keeping grass vegetative will help suppress the amount of toxins produced. This can also be done by using the chemical herbicide Metsulfuron (eg, Chaparral.) Refraining from grazing fescue during the hottest months and instead grazing another type of forage is also effective.

A strategy that is gaining more attention is to use some sort of commercial product that claims to reduce the effects of fescue toxicity. Many of these products come in the form of mineral supplements or protein tubs with some sort of special additive. A high- quality mineral is always a good idea; not necessarily because it alone will overcome fescue toxicity, but because it will enhance cattle performance and allow them to better deal with stress. There is some research that supports the use of some “fescue fighting” feed additives, but they are not all the same. It is important to research what effect that the additive that you are interested in will have. For example, products that contain FEB-200, a yeast cell wall product, will bind some toxins in the gut, resulting in them being excreted. Other additives may encourage blood circulation or support immune response.

Whatever approach you chose to help deal with the effects of fescue toxicosis, make sure to do your research first. If you have questions or would just like some pointers, your local cooperative extension agent is always happy to help.



Upcoming Events

Pond Management Workshop	September 19
6pm, Stanly Co. Agri-Civic Center, 2 hrs. pesticide A,D,I,N,X	
Pesticide Class, Stanly Co. Agri-Civic Center	September 20
9:30-11:30 am, 2 hrs ABDGHIKLMNOTX 1:00pm-3:00pm, 2 hrs V	
Anson Co. Ag Expo, Fair & Livestock Show	September 22 & 23
Circle G Arena, Lilesville	
Anson Co. Cattlemen's Meeting	October 10
7pm Anson Co Extension Center	
Union Co. Cattlemen's Meeting	October 19
7pm Union Ag Center	
Pesticide School & Exam	November 29 & 30
Stanly Co Agri Civic Center	
Feeder Calf Sale Marketing Meeting	November 30
Time, TBD Stanly Co	
Union County Performance Tested Bull Sale	December 2
12pm, Union Co. Livestock Market	
Stanly Select Bull Sale	January 6
12pm, Stanly Co. Livestock Market	
Southern Piedmont Winter Beef Conference	January 25
Union County Ag Center, Monroe	

Persons with disability or persons with limited English proficiency can request accommodations by contacting Jessica Morgan, Extension Agent, 704.694.2415, Fax 704.694.2248, or e-mail jessica_morgan@ncsu.edu at least five days prior to any event listed in this newsletter.

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