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### WEANING TIME

John Cothren, Extension Agent, Wilkes County

Weaning time for many fall-born calves is rapidly approaching. We all know that weaning is the removal of a suckling calf from the cow. But, what might not be so obvious are all the stressors and impacts associated with weaning, both for the calf and the cow. Weaning can also be stressful for the owner of the animals, especially if the weaned calves are placed in a pen near a person's bedroom window. As animal managers, we should try and make weaning as stress-free as we can, while keeping productivity and profitability in line with our goals.

Several factors can influence time of weaning, including loss of dam, forage resources and cow body condition, sale time, other farm activities. If forage is in short supply or cow body condition is low, calves can be weaned early (before 8 months). This preserves cow energy reserves to allow for development of the new calf inside her and keep her in good shape for timely re-breeding after that calf is born. Another option available that many people use is weaning based on the Moon phases / signs. One "rule" for weaning is to do it when the Moon is in the signs of Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius and Pisces. These signs rule the thighs, knees, ankles, and feet, and the dates listed in the Farmers' Almanac are based on this rule.

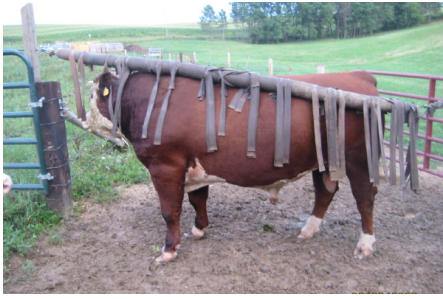
Preparing calves well in advance to actual weaning time has benefits well worth the effort. Because immune function and response is lower in times of stress, and weaning can be stressful, many veterinarians suggest that vaccinations be given 3-4 weeks prior to weaning and that deworming be done after weaning. This not only lessens the stress at weaning, but also improves immune response to the vaccines. Other management procedures, such as castration and dehorning should be done well in advance of weaning. Also, it is a good idea to make sure that, before weaning, calves are used to eating the intended post-weaning diet. You can feed that

diet to both cows and calves for a short period of time, about two-weeks, or provide it in a creep feeder - narrow passages into a feeding area are set up



so the calves creep in, but larger cows cannot. Although creep feeding can be used to acclimate calves to a post-weaning diet, it's primarily use is to provide supplemental feed to nursing calves in order to increase weaning weight. Make sure that the post-weaning diet is appropriate for the age of calf, including forage quantity and quality, and contains a vitamin/mineral mix and plenty of fresh, accessible water. For the very young calf, this means a special calf starter diet, either bagged or specially formulated feed. For older calves, good quality forage (fall pasture regrowth, irrigated summer pasture, or very good quality hay/silage) will suffice, depending on target performance. Make sure they can safely reach water and know how to drink it.

Whether you're weaning consists of total separation of cows and calves or the relatively new, low stress technique of fence line weaning, make sure you address nutrition and health measures. Total separation weaning can be accomplished with good success if pre-weaning and post-weaning management address stress, health, and nutritional management sufficiently. For traditional weaning, it is best to have cows and calves together in the place where calves will stay. Remove cows to a new location out of sight and sound from calves. Leave calves in familiar surroundings. It is normal for cattle to bawl for several days. In fence line weaning, cows and calves are placed on opposite sides of a strong fence (woven wire or multiple-strand, high-tensile wire). As with total separation weaning, cows are moved and calves remain in the initial pasture. Although the cattle are seldom seen challenging the fence, they have some nose-to-nose contact, but spend the majority of time grazing away from the fence. Fence line visits gradually decrease over the first five days and the weaning process is complete within a week. Studies have shown these calves bawled less and gained more weight during the weaning process than with complete separation weaning.



## Fly Control in Beef Cattle: A Multi-Faceted Approach

Jessica Morgan, Anson County Agriculture Agent

Flies will never be eliminated completely, let's go ahead and understand that. But, with proper management, their effects on cattle health can be reduced. Some fly species feed on the blood of cattle, literally draining them of their own blood by biting thousands of times in a day. Cattle must then expend their energy in the hot summer months to renew their blood supply, much like a person after giving blood, they can be weak, disoriented, and stressed. Flies are also a nuisance, causing cattle to stomp feet, shake heads, flick tails constantly and are under stress when doing so. Flies also carry disease such as pinkeye which can provide a substantial economic loss. There are lots of options for fly control but there is no silver bullet. The best method for fly control is a multi-pronged effort, attacking flies in multiple ways.

- **Fly tags-** Just like pesticides, it is a good idea to mix active ingredients in fly tags. For example, use tags that have pyrethroids for two years, then switch to an organophosphate to prevent resistance. Tags require two tags/adult animal and one tag/calf for optimum control. Do not use less than the recommended number because it will build a tolerance to a lesser dose of the chemical. The key to using tags is to wait until there is at least 200 flies/cow to apply the tags. Resistance issues can be seen if the tags are left in the ears too long. The recommendation is typically 3-5 months, but read the label of each brand to determine the length and remove tag promptly.
- **Pour-ons –** It is a good idea to apply a pour-on at the same time as placing fly-tags in the cows. In the spring, using a product that is combined fly/internal parasites is a good idea. Later in the year, use a product only labeled for flies. Consistently using a dewormer for fly control can lead to internal parasite resistance issues.
- **Dust bags/cattle rubs-** If placed at a site where all cattle must use it, it is seen as effective and economical to control face and horn flies.
- **Sprays-** If cattle are grazing an extensive area, sprays can be time consuming. However, if they are in a smaller area, sprays can go along way in helping control the fly populations. They are the only control method for stable flies. Sanitation around barns/out buildings and clean-up of wasted feed can also help reduce localized development around buildings.

There are plenty of options on the market that tout fly control, however planning a multi-faceted approach with proper timing will help control fly populations. Flies will never be completely eliminated but with strategy can be severely reduced.

Sources: Hilton, W.M. DVM. *Beef Magazine. 5 Essential Steps for Fly Control on Cattle.*

Boxler, D. UNL- *Beef. Reducing Fly Numbers on Pastured Cattle.*

## Extension Cattle Call Giveaway

**Congratulations to Mike Brotherton, who won the Dectomax De-Wormer in the April drawing. A huge “Thank You” to Zoetis and Dr. Bradley Mills for their support of this publication.**



**For our next drawing we will be giving away 5 bags of Southern States Beef Breeder Minerals donated by Southern States. It only takes a minute to enter the drawing. All you need to do is call the Wilkes Extension office at 651-7348 or 651-7331 and say the key phrase “Free Minerals 2015”. Someone will take your name and number and enter you into the drawing to be held on July 31<sup>st</sup>.**

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