

NEWS COLUMN

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September 25, 2009

Consider Timely Weaning of Calves

Fall is upon us as the leaves are turning, the days are growing shorter and everyone is busy preparing for harvest.

It is also the time of year to wean spring born calves away from the cow. Although not often seen directly, timely weaning (prior to November) is a sound and progressive economic management tool. By doing so, it maximizes the genetic potential of the calf by creating more performance. It is more efficient to feed calves directly than to feed cows to sustain milk production. A little known fact is that a beef cow's milk production peaks 60 days after calving. So by now, very little calf growth is occurring from the cow's milk flow. University research has also shown that once calves attain the weight of 500 pounds by weaning them health is also less compromised. Calves that go to the corn stalks without creep feed often gain very little. In many cases less than a pound a day.

Secondly and maybe just as important, early and timely weaning of calves allows the cow or heifer time to gain back weight and condition on crop residue or fall pasture. This can be done later however is more expensive with high energy diets in cold winter conditions. Cows can gain much more efficiently in mild weather. Dry cows consume 30% less forage than lactating cows. They also require only 60% of the energy and 50% of the protein and water compared to lactating cows.

Weaning is also a great time to review the cow herd for culling. (Open females, old cows, poor milkers, bad attitudes, bad eyes, poor feet and legs, etc.) Get rid of them now and save some winter feed. Soon the cull cow market will start to make its annual seasonal decline as mid October through mid January is traditionally when a majority of beef cow culling occurs.