

ON THE RANCH

Upcoming Events

Flood Recovery for Cropland Webinar

September 12
9:30 a.m.
Courthouse Annex
Center, Nebraska

September 12
9:30 a.m.
Extension Office
Hartington, Nebraska

Fenceline Low Stress Weaning

Spring calving herds across the Midwest and Southwest will soon be planning to wean the calves. Some producers may wean the calves from young or thin cows during late September in order to regain some body condition before winter adds to the nutrient requirements. However, many herds will wean at the more traditional times of late October to early November.

Calves that are enrolled in Value-added programs must be weaned at least 45 days prior to sale date. During those 45 days the calves must grow and gain efficiently. Therefore it is critical that these calves go through the weaning process with a minimum of stress and start to gain immediately.

Methods to reduce stress on the calves have become of great interest to producers. Therefore, weaning strategies have been studied in recent years. California researchers weaned calves with only a fence (Fenceline) separating them from their dams. These were compared to calves weaned totally separate (Separate) from dams. The Separate Calves could not see or hear their dams. Calf behaviors were monitored for five days following weaning. Fenceline calves and cows spent approximately 60% and 40% of their time, respectively within 10 feet of the fence during the first two days. During the first three days, Fenceline calves bawled and walked less, and ate and rested more, but these differences disappeared by the fourth day. All calves were managed together starting 7 days after weaning.

After two weeks, Fenceline calves had gained 23 pounds more than Separate calves. This difference persisted since, after 10 weeks, Fenceline calves had gained 110 pounds (1.57 lb/day), compared to 84 pounds (1.20 lb/day) for Separate calves. There was no report of any differences in sickness, but calves that eat more during the first days after weaning should stay healthier. In fact, another study conducted at Ohio State University indicated that Fenceline calves had a lower incidence of respiratory diseases.

Producers that have tried Fenceline weaning will remind us that it takes good, well maintained fences and adequate water supplies for both sides of the fence. Remember, a large number of cattle are going to be congregated in a small area for several days. Therefore, water availability for both cows and calves is critical. To wean and background, even for short periods, Fenceline weaning should be considered.

Source: Dr. Rick Rasby, Professor of Animal Science, Animal Science, University of Nebraska - Lincoln, Lincoln, NE

