On The Ranch

Cow-Calf Cost Breakdown – Feed Cost

A one page sample budget, Estimated Annual Cow Costs for Nebraska (http://go.unl.edu/ft2w) provides an example and a place to start to begin to calculate total costs for feed for the cow herd. Evaluating available feed resources, both grazed and harvested feed, in comparison to nutrition needs and demands of the cow herd throughout the year can indicate where opportunities are to make change. These changes might be as small as providing strategic protein supplement or as large as changing from a spring calving to a fall calving herd.
More information can be found at:
http://newsroom.unl.edu/announce/beef/6901/39108

Weeds in Alfalfa May Suggest Reseeding

Bruce Anderson, Extension Professor, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Did weeds take over your alfalfa this summer? Well, join the crowd. So, why were the weeds so vigorous and what might happen to your alfalfa?

Weeds seemed to show up everywhere in alfalfa fields during August. And I'm not exactly sure why. One thing is for sure, though. The weeds were worst in older fields, thinner stands, and in areas where rainfall was higher than normal.

Summer weeds that invade alfalfa when rain is heavy isn't unusual, especially if it is wet right after harvest. Alfalfa stubble just doesn't compete well with weeds, so weed growth gets a jump start on the alfalfa.

If the alfalfa plants are healthy and vigorous, though, this weed invasion should be just a temporary problem. After the next cutting, or maybe as late as next year, most weeds will disappear and the alfalfa will take over again.

What I'm more concerned about are your older fields, those fields starting to get a little thin. I've noticed this year that many alfalfa fields seemed to be getting weaker and weaker as the year went on, especially if they were harvested within a month of the previous cut.

What I think is happening is that alfalfa plants in many fields have slowly been weakened naturally by root and crown diseases, but they weren't killed. Then, as the summer went on, the weakened root systems eventually couldn't handle the stress caused by frequent harvesting. So plants slowly died. And weeds invaded the open areas.

If this scenario describes one or more of your alfalfa fields, check it closely this fall. It might be time to reseed.

Preparing to reseed now will help avoid bad surprises next spring.


Weaning is a major stress in a calf's life and on their immune system. Photo courtesy of Troy Walz.

Nebraska BQA: Preconditioning and Weaning Preparation

By Rob Eirich, Nebraska Beef Quality Assurance,
University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension

Cow-calf producers are nearing weaning time of their 2017 calf crop, with current market and industry trends, producers should be considering and preparing for preconditioning or weaning programs. It is important to consider the best programs for the health of calves during these stressful periods and into the feeding phases.

Preconditioning is designed to mitigate stress that occurs during the transitional period between weaning and going on feed or moving into the next production cycle. The typical preconditioning program involves a health protocol of vaccinations administered 21-30 days prior to weaning. The basic concept of preconditioning programs is to boost the calf's health status or immune system prior to exposure to stressors and pathogens as the calves enter that next production cycle. Preconditioning has also been shown to improve efficiency, as well as, reduce the risk and cost of treatment for health diagnosis after weaning. Nebraska Extension NebGuide G2248, "Economic Considerations for Preconditioning Calves for Feedlots" (http://extensionpublications.unl.edu/assets/pdf/g2248.pdf), can assist producers that are considering preconditioning for their operations.

The first step in developing a preconditioning or weaning program should be to consult with your veterinarian under a Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR). Working with your veterinarian will ensure a program designed specifically for your operation goals, and addressing the potential pathogens or parasites the animals might encounter. The recommended preconditioning or weaning protocol from the University of Nebraska Great Plains Veterinary Education Center includes a four-way BRD viral (IBR, BVD, PI3, and BRSV), BRD bacterial (at least Mannheimia Hemolytica), and clostridial (Blackleg) vaccinations. It is also important to follow Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) guidelines by reading product labels to ensure proper handling, storage, and administration of these products.

With the changes in feeding medicated feeds through the Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD), preparation before weaning is important. Producers should consult with their veterinarian to review not only vaccination protocols but also treatment protocols for health issues that may have a high risk of occurring in the coming months. Documented treatment protocols can ensure proper treatment of illness or lameness diagnosis. If the protocol calls for treatment with a feed grade antibiotic, producers must have a written order or VFD signed by their veterinarian with appropriate copies for the feed supplier and themselves, prior to administering these type of products. Some of these VFDs can be in place prior to actual health risk occurring for prevention or control, in addition to treatment. VFD information can be found online at: http://bqa.unl.edu/veterinary-feed-directive .

Weaning is a major stress in a calf's life and on their immune system. As producers, it is our responsibility to develop the best vaccination and treatment programs to ensure the health, care and wellbeing of these calves. Preparation can help in making this transition less stressful on livestock and producers.