APRIL 2024: ON FEED

Dakotaland Feeds, LLC

A NEWSLETTER OF DAKOTALAND FEEDS

Transition Matters

In a Nutshell:

- **Heifers might lose 3.0 lbs/d transitioning to grass**
- **Severe weight loss causes heifers to stop cycling**
- **Weight loss at turnout can be lessened by supplements**
- **Hauling stress also impacts pregnancy retention**
- **Accuration® Tubs or Blocks are self-fed energy supplements**
- **Availa® 4 trace minerals also help with pregnancy retention**

The warmer weather and sunshine has been very welcomed. With it, pastures are starting to green up, and it looks like we will be to grass significantly earlier than last year. Going to grass typically coincides with breeding season, and making sure we have all the heifers and cows ready to breed is one of the most critical times nutritionally for cattle producers.

With heifers or young cows in particular, going from a drylot or winter feeding situation where producers provide everything they consume, to a pasture where they must go out and forage, can be a difficult transition from a nutrition standpoint. Particularly with replacement heifers who have not grazed since they were with momma, it takes some time before they quit running the fences and figure out how to eat and get back on an increasing plane of nutrition. SDSU research has indicated heifers developed in a drylot exhibit significant weight loss (over 3.0 lbs/d) during the first week of grazing (Perry, 2015). When this occurs at the same time as breeding, it can cause a significant stress. SDSU research showed nearly a 10% reduction in AI conception rate when heifers were transitioned to grazing at the same time as breeding. Other work evaluating nutrient restriction in heifers found that they stopped ovulating within 2 weeks of when nutrient restriction occurred (Mackey et al, 1999). This is the last thing we need at breeding time.

After documenting the weight loss in heifers naïve to grazing, SDSU looked at strategies to offset this weight loss. Supplementing heifers that were moved to pasture immediately after AI helped significantly reduce weight loss over the first 42 days of grazing. Supplemented heifers gained 32 lbs while control heifers lost 5 lbs. Not only that, but AI pregnancy success increased from 61% on pasture alone to 76% when dried distillers were supplemented to heifers on pasture during that first 42 days.

The negative energy balance that naïve grazers experience is a problem for many producers. Often, we keep heifers up near working facilities until we can get them AI-bred and then hauled to pasture. We know hauling stress can also impact pregnancy rates and that we want to haul heifers either within the first 5 days post-AI or not until about 42 days post-AI to avoid the reduction in pregnancy rates that transportation stress can cause. However, that means that we are coincidentally putting heifers through a nutritional change without any transition or acclimation period at the same time that we are trying to get them bred.

The good news is that with supplementation, we can overcome this negative energy balance that cattle experience at turnout time. SDSU recovered losses by supplementing with distillers grains, but other energy sources would work, as well. If you are not interested in making daily or near-daily trips to the pasture to supplement cattle, Purina® Accuration® Tubs or Blocks will be a good fit. Accuration® Blocks are soft blocks that allow cattle to have higher consumption than the normal Purina® cooked molasses protein or mineral tubs. Cattle rake the block with their teeth, and consumption will likely be in the neighborhood of 1-3 lbs/d. This allows us to get more supplement upfront in the grazing season when these cattle most need supplementation. This is not the cheapest way to supplement heifers on grass, but it will be the most convenient and safest way to get high quality energy into the heifers to help maintain condition and avoid the post-turnout slump. This might not be something that you need to continue all summer, but rather you might strategically use this product when you need energy supplementation to try to enhance pregnancy retention.

Feeding Availa® 4 trace minerals from Zinpro®, which are in the Ultimate Breeder mineral, Purina® Wind and Rain® Storm® with Availa® 4 mineral and tubs, and the Cow Balancer products, can also help reduce

embryo loss. The point is to decrease the number of later calvers and front-load the calving season. Every time we move a cow from conceiving later to one cycle earlier, we likely add about 40 lbs to that calf's weaning weight. Consider that a calf averages 2.0 lbs of weight per day of age. If a cow gets bred and doesn't have to wait that 21 days before her next chance to breed, that adds up to about 40 lbs.

It's a busy time of year and as we approach breeding season, remember that supplementation can help you front-load the calving season. Ask your local Dakotaland Feeds consultant about ways to provide your heifers and cows what they need as we go to grass.

Roxanne Knock, PhD

What do you need to be thinking about this time of year?

- Use a good mineral program for breeding season—ask about Ultimate Breeder 8 or Zinpro® Availa® 4 Tubs
- Get a high magnesium mineral to prevent grass tetany during early season grazing
- Implant cattle going to grass
- Start feeding Altosid® to prevent horn fly populations
- Order wasps for feedlot fly control or add ClariFly® to your feedlot supplement
- Ask about using Diamond V Yeast Culture™ for heat stress mitigation for feedlot cattle during summer months
- Get the bulls in good body condition—they should be a BCS 5 or 6 at 60 d prior to breeding
- Make sure the bulls have mineral, too! Purina® Stress Tubs or Ultimate Breeder mineral provide Availa® 4 mineral
- Have a breeding soundness exam and semen test done on your bulls to help ensure high pregnancy rates
- Talk to your veterinarian about your spring vaccination and de-worming plans

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