



# BEEF CATTLE TIME

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## Make Body Condition Scoring a Routine Practice

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Body condition scoring (BCS) is a practice that should be carried out at the weaning of the calf crop along with pregnancy checking and cow culling. Body Condition Scores are indicators of the cows' nutritional condition.

Body Condition Scoring uses a numerical value to estimate energy on fat reserves. The values range from 1 to 9. Cows in the lower numbers (1, 2 or 3) have less energy stores and are considered skinny. Cows with BCS scores of 4, 5 or 6 are average, and the cows in 7, 8 and 9 range can be easily recognized as fat.

Body Condition Score at calving has an important impact on the future calf crop. Mature cows should be in a BCS of 5 while first calf replacement heifers should be in a BCS of 6.

Females in a BCS less than 5 for mature cows and 6 for heifers will experience reduced reproductive performance. For example, cows that are in the thin group will be longer returning to heat following calving compared to those in the average BCS. (If cows are not cycling, they are not going to settle.) This delay in returning to heat delays rebreeding and the future calf crop will be born at a later date, and if weaned at the same time next year will be lighter. Cows that are in the thin group should be separated and fed and managed to gain up to the average BCS.

Producers should observe the cows throughout the annual production cycle. BCS should be done at weaning, at two to three months before calving, at calving and at other times throughout the year. These periodic checks

allow the producer to make adjustments in nutrition and management practices to improve BCS before calving. By scoring the cows at weaning, they can be sorted into these groups for fall and winter feeding. The thin cows can be fed to gain weight, the average cows can be maintained, and the fat cows can lose condition.

Why are the cows in a thin BCS? The answer is inadequate nutritional intake. Aged cows (10 years plus) are likely to be in a thin BCS. This low score can be attributed to poor physical condition that includes arthritis, structural problems and loss of teeth. While working the cows, check their physical soundness. Unless these thin, old cows are separated from the other cows, they will not be able to secure their nutritional needs and continue to lose in physical condition. A high percentage of these cows will not live to see the green grass next spring. These cows should also be candidates for culling and marketing.

Body condition of the cows directly affects the reproductive performance of the cow herd and the profitability of the cow herd. Grouping the cows into 3 BCS groups can be easily done and would fit most Tennessee beef cow herds. Observe your cows at weaning and determine their BCS because it will affect the herd's profitability.

## Where is Your Bull?

*Clyde Lane Jr.*

*Professor - Animal Science*

Where is your bull? The breeding season was months ago and the next breeding season is months ahead. Still, the bull is a necessary evil that must be dealt with.

Often the bull is shuffled off to a separate pasture and almost forgotten. It is essential that the bull receive adequate nutrition so he will be in good condition at the start

of the next breeding season. If a quality pasture is available, it may be adequate to meet his needs. If the pasture is of low quality or unavailable, he will need supplemental feed.

Look at the bull to determine if his body condition score should be adjusted. Making adjustments now should be relatively easy since there are several months available before the next breeding season.

Most producers provide a mineral mixture that contains adequate calcium, phosphorus, copper, zinc, selenium and other minerals to the cow herd. When the bull was removed from the herd, did you continue to provide him with a mix? Failure to provide a quality mineral can drastically reduce a bull's ability to produce quality semen.

The bull may be a problem to deal with outside the breeding season, but do not forget him. Take care of him now so he will be ready next season.

## **Are Your Vaccines Being Stored Properly?**

*Clyde Lane Jr.*

*Professor - Animal Science*

How are you managing the vaccines that you purchased for your herd? Improper storage can reduce the ability of a vaccine to work properly.

Since the majority of manufacturers require that their vaccines be kept between 35 F and 45 F, many producers store vaccines in a refrigerator. Does the refrigerator you use keep the temperature within this range? A study done in Arkansas revealed that only 27 percent of refrigerators surveyed on producers' farms were maintaining the temperature within this range for 95 percent of the time. Researchers also found that 24 percent of the refrigerators were keeping the temperature within this range only 5 percent of the time.

The results of this study reveal that just putting vaccine in the refrigerator is not adequate – you must check the temperature in the refrigerator. A good suggestion is to keep a thermometer in the unit. Check the temperature several times when you first place it in the refrigerator as the temperature in the unit can fluctuate. Check several times over the next few days at differing times to determine the highs and lows. Adjust the thermostat so that all readings are within the recommended 35 F to 45 F range. If the unit cannot be adjusted to stay within the range, call a refrigeration technician.

Be sure to purchase only those vaccines that have been maintained at the proper temperature by the retailer. Also, always carry a cooler to transport vaccines. Put ice packs in the cooler and then place newspaper over them

to keep the vaccine from coming in direct contact with the ice and freezing.

Proper care of vaccines is necessary to provide an acceptable level of immunity for your animals. Check your refrigerator and be sure it is keeping the vaccine at the proper temperature.

## **Weed Control in Tall Fescue Pastures and Hayfields**

*Gary Bates*

*Professor - Plant Sciences*

Weeds are considered one of the biggest problems in tall fescue pastures and hayfields across the state. Buttercup, musk thistle, buckhorn plantain and horsenettle are just a few of the weeds that can move quickly into fields and cause production losses. There are several ways to minimize the problems caused by weeds.

**Correct stand and soil fertility problems.** Weeds move into fields because they can outcompete the existing plants. We have all seen thick, aggressive stands of tall fescue that have little weed pressure – there is no space for a weed seed to germinate and grow. To minimize weed pressure, you have to have a strong stand of grass. You may kill all the weeds this year, but if large portions of the ground remain bare, a new crop of weeds will germinate and grow. Be sure that poor soil fertility is not the reason for the poor stand. A soil test will give you the information needed for proper fertilization and liming. Soil test and follow the recommendations now. Once fertility problems are corrected, evaluate the stand of grass. If it is weak, consider replanting this fall.

**Identify the weeds.** Before using herbicides, know the specific weeds you are trying to kill. Certain weeds are more difficult to kill, so herbicides, application timings and rates may vary. If you don't know the name of a weed, bring a sample to your local Extension office for help in identification and specific herbicide recommendations.

**Spray at the appropriate time.** Knowing whether a weed grows during the winter or summer is essential in knowing the proper time to spray with a herbicide. For winter weeds such as buttercup, musk thistle and buckhorn plantain, a herbicide should be sprayed during either December or March for adequate control. After two to three days of warm weather, the weed will be growing enough to take up the herbicide and be controlled.

Some weeds, such as horsenettle, pigweed and cocklebur, only grow during the summer (May to October or November). The winter or spring application will not

adequately control them, because they are not up yet. A late May or June herbicide application is needed for these weeds. Summer sprays are more difficult, mainly due to all of the sensitive crops that are around. Cotton, soybeans, tomatoes and tobacco can be severely damaged by drift from herbicides. Know the surrounding crops before using herbicides, particularly during summer.

**Select the proper herbicide.** Many herbicides are available; be sure to use one that is labeled for pasture and hay. It is illegal to use any herbicide on pastures and hayfields that has not been tested and approved for use. Just because it works does not mean it is safe. Read and follow all label instructions when using herbicides.

Many weeds can be controlled adequately with 2,4-D. Buttercup and musk thistle can be almost totally controlled with a 2-pints-per-acre application. If buckhorn or broadleaf plantain is present, increase the rate to 4 pints per acre. This higher rate will take out both red and white clover. If applied in December, clovers can be replanted in February or March.

For weeds that are more difficult to control, particularly summer weeds such as horsenettle and tall ironweed, new herbicides such as Forefront, Grazon and PastureGard are available. Specific recommendations will depend on location of your farm, the weed, and other factors.

Following these recommendations should help you minimize weed growth and improve the yield of your pasture and hayfields.

## **We All Need to Help Make the Connection**

*Emmit L. Rawls*

*Professor, Agricultural Economics*

Recently, I visited the Blount County Farm Tour at Dr. Dick Daugherty's farm. There, approximately 500 fourth-graders from local schools had the opportunity to visit 17 talks and hands-on activities about agriculture. Farmers and other professionals explained where food comes from and how it is produced. The speakers covered topics such as cattle, swine, sheep, goat, poultry and milk production. About 65 such farm days have been conducted in Tennessee the past year with the help of county Farm Bureaus and county cattle and livestock associations.

Only about 2 percent of the population is engaged in producing food and fiber for the rest of the country and part of the world, so few people have lived on or visited a farm. Fewer families are staying on the farm and the number of people available to support agriculture in various agribusinesses and government jobs is dwindling. Since

fewer people have farm-related experience, many do not understand routine production practices, especially those related to animal agriculture. The connection between a cow and hamburger might come naturally to some, but it is not a given to a larger and larger portion of our population.

The Blount County Farm Tour and similar events help bridge the gap between production agriculture and food and fiber. Agriculture in the Classroom, managed in this state by the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation, is a similar program. This past year 1,100 Tennessee teachers received training and teaching materials to inform students about production agriculture and how it relates to the food and fiber we all need and use. Information about the program is available from county Farm Bureau offices or online at [www.agclassroom.org](http://www.agclassroom.org).

Another reason those in production agriculture need to make the connection: many organizations discourage consumption of beef or other animal products. Some of these groups produce materials for students which depict animal agriculture in an unfavorable light. Also, an increasing number of consumers are choosing a rural lifestyle, producing their own food, and seeking locally produced food. While that may be a trend, it will be very difficult to feed our country on that basis. The efficiencies of production agriculture allow others to live in town, large or small, and have others produce the food and fiber they use.

## **2010 Integrated Resource Management Calendar Available**

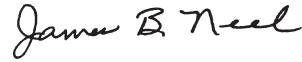
*Clyde Lane Jr.*

*Professor - Animal Science*

The 2010 Beef Integrated Resource Calendar (IRM) published by UT Extension is now available at county Extension offices. The calendar contains beef cattle management tips for each month of the year for both spring and fall calving herds, a gestation table, and a special section that provides details on how the Process Verified Program (PVP) works. The calendar is available online at [www.utextension.utk.edu/publications/pbfiles/PB1663-2009.pdf](http://www.utextension.utk.edu/publications/pbfiles/PB1663-2009.pdf). Tennessee Department of Agriculture animal health technicians and Tennessee Livestock Network members also have the calendars available.

## Beef Cattle Events — Fall 2009

|                 |                                                                            |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| October 22 – 23 | Tennessee-Kentucky Cow-Calf Conference, Fairgrounds, Springfield, TN       |
| November 6      | Tennessee Forage-Grasslands Conference, Ellington Center, Nashville        |
| January 21      | Senior Bull Sale, Test Station, Spring Hill                                |
| January 21 – 23 | Tennessee Cattlemen's Association Convention, Embassy Suites, Murfreesboro |



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### Beef Cattle Time

From:

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Leader/Agent

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