

Beef Briefs

by
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Editor's Note: Regular readers of our livestock page may have noticed a lapse in our Beef Briefs column last month. The hiccup in proceedings was caused by Dr. Lester Burdette's retirement, and more information on that event is included in this section.

Since we instituted our beef column last year, Dr. Burdette has been a valued contributor of sound management advice and we're going to miss him.

Coming on stream with this issue is Lancaster County livestock agent, Chet Hughes, who notes that, while he may not be able to physically fill Dr. Burdette's shoes, he will try to do his best in the figurative sense. Chet, of course, is no stranger to our readers, having written a general livestock column for us during the past three years. A cattleman himself, Chet is well-known in Angus circles, and currently serves as secretary of the Pennsylvania Angus Association.

As with our other livestock columnists, Chet will appear on this page once a month. The rotation will continue to be beef, poultry, sheep and swine.

Welcome aboard, Chester!

August: Stress Time For Beef Cattle

For the cow/calf operator guide by a satisfactory management schedule, the month of August is generally regarded as a time of less labor. The bulk of the hay crop is in, most AI breeding is completed, and the cows continue to tend to their growing calves. The clean-up bulls are turned into the herd and the cattleman can relax on his porch, sip a lemonade and admire his favorite cows.

Unfortunately, good management cannot stop and sometimes the stresses associated with late summer and the cow herd, require the alert attention of the herd manager. Before you sit back and totally relax, consider

the following factors that make August a challenge.

The weather seems to be responsible for much of what can happen in late summer and generally our native grass and clover pastures begin to fail at this time of year. During a dry period, like this year, the stress becomes even greater. When the available forage falters, so does milk production; perhaps when the calves need the most nutrition.

Supplemental feeding of the cows and/or the calves may be appropriate, and sometimes necessary. But this additional feeding may cause additional problems, like bloat and scours,

especially calves are introduced to a new feed source. High protein grain rations and new legume hay (alfalfa) are often culprits of bloat and/or scours. Bloat, especially, should be treated as an emergency. Your veterinarian is equipped to easily treat this condition, but time is a factor with a bloated animal.

Additionally, failing cool season grasses that are poorly managed, often leave poisonous weeds and plants as the only source of grazing material, which can be fatal to a hungry ruminant. Some that come to mind are: nightshade, May apple, pokeweed, and morning glory. And if your farm borders a residential area, be alert for neighbors who may, unknowingly, toss clippings of poisonous ornamentals to your hungry cows. Summer storms can also cause broken tree limbs, and wilted wild cherry leaves are readily eaten by hungry cattle, often producing fatal results.

The hot, humid weather of August provided a favorable atmosphere for flies and worms. This is a very good time to treat suckling calves for worms and the entire herd should have access to a backrubber, dust bag or any other fly control method. Cattle comfort is very important for appetite, cycling activity, and general health. Your herd should have access to a cool shaded area, whether it be a woods, pine grove, a simple shed, or a barn with fans.

Finally, my thoughts turn to the all important water source. In August, mature beef cows can easily consume 15 to 20 gallons of water daily. They prefer a clean, cool fresh source, low in nitrates and bacteria, much like you or I would. Remember that August can be a time when streams are dried up, and ponds stagnant, so daily filling of the stock tank may be mandatory.

Just when you were about to relax in your rocking chair with an iced tea, I had to bring up all of these late summer stresses. Keep these thoughts in mind, practice sound beef cattle management, and stay alert for August's challenges!

Penn State Beef Specialist Dr. Lester Burdette Retires

UNIVERSITY PARK — Lester A. Burdette, professor of animal science, retired from the University on June 30 with emeritus status.

Dr. Burdette, who joined the College of Agriculture faculty in 1957, has been responsible for beef cattle education programs with the Cooperative Extension Service and has been extension coordinator for livestock programs in Penn State's Department of Dairy and Animal Science. He specialized in nutrition and management programs for cattle breeders and feeders, as well as housing and equipment for all phases of beef production.

Dr. Burdette started his extension career as an assistant county agent in York County. "When I started out, I was working with nearly every species of meat animal livestock. We were more like generalists than specialists," he says. "But as livestock production became more specialized it became more difficult to keep up with all the changes that were taking place. We had to concentrate on one or two species."

One of the biggest changes he has seen is the number of beef cows on Pennsylvania farms. "When I started at Penn State there were roughly 55,000 beef cows in the state. Today there are nearly 200,000."

Much of this growth has been because of changes in rural communities. "Many farms have



Dr. Lester Burdette

switched from dairy or poultry operations to beef when the operators took off-farm jobs," says Dr. Burdette. "Other small beef farms have been started by those who were escaping city life. It's a challenge to coordinate production and marketing options so that the small beef farm, which is typical in Pennsylvania, can remain competitive in today's economy."

A native of Mercer County, Dr. Burdette received his Ph.D., M.S. and B.S. degrees in animal husbandry and production, all from Penn State. Dr. Burdette lives with his wife, Johanne, in Pennsylvania Furnace. He is the father of four children - Nancy, David, Shirley and James.

LIVESTOCK LATEST



Embryo Transplants Beef Up Profits For Va. Cattleman

BY JULIE GOCHENOUR

Virginia Correspondent

WOODSTOCK, Va. — It's simple, Wilson Eastep says.

The purpose of any beef cattle operation, purebred or commercial, is to sell their animals at the best possible prices. And embryo transplants are helping the cattlemen do just that.

A little over 10 years ago, the Simmental breeder and his family went into the cattle business for themselves. They spent those first years acquiring animals, building herd numbers, and breeding up from a percentage to a purebred polled herd of Simmentals. Even though demand was still strong for the relatively new breed and producers were eagerly buying "half-blood" and "three-quarter"

animals, Wilson figured it couldn't last.

And it didn't. The number of Simmental herds increased, Virginia and Maryland began restricting sales to full-bloods and purebreds (7/8th Simmental) and buyers, faced with expanding availability, Eastep recalls, could begin to be selective. In short, supply caught up with demand and it soon took more than the word "Simmental" to make a sale.

Today, with this the current situation, the Lakeview herd includes 35 full-blood, 60 purebred and 30 "percentage" cows such as half-bloods, which Eastep describes as the "bottom layer" of his herd. Until he started using embryo transplants, they were also the least profitable.



Wilson Eastep and daughter Teresa look over a crop of five one-month-old ET calves sired by Lightning. Dam, also named Teresa, is a Signal daughter.

Lakeview Simmentals is a medium sized operation marketing purebred and full-blood heifers to other breeders and bulls to commercial cattlemen who want to add Simmental size and growth to their herd's offspring. "We were getting pretty nice bull calves and pretty nice heifers from our half and three-quarter cows, but they weren't the percentage we needed" Eastep explains. "We couldn't sell them, merchandise them, like we could a purebred — they just wouldn't bring the money."

The answer for his operation, he decided, was embryo transplants. "We figured we could use these half and three-quarter cows that we already have, who have proven to be good milkers and good mothers, to carry the top quality embryos we wanted. Then we would have more full-blood bulls and heifers from the same herd — but everything would be high percentage."

"If you have a half-blood cow and you breed her to a purebred bull, you get a three-quarters calf," he continues. "That's worth

just a little over market price if you sell it to an individual privately. But if you've got an embryo in that half-blood cow and you're lucky enough to sell the calf at an average price for a purebred ET heifer or bull, it should be worth twice as much."

Embryo transplants allow Eastep to make maximum use of both the top and bottom layers of his herd, and the process at Lakeview is a completely self contained operation. Instead of buying fertilized eggs, the cat-

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Dr. Joe Lineweaver flushes Miss Super Charger with owner Wilson Eastep assisting. Average flush yields eight to 10 viable embryos.