



**CURRENT COW COSTS**

For most herds of beef cows in Pennsylvania, the next few weeks represent the most costly time of the year.

Most spring-calving cows have either already calved or are very close to calving date. Couple this nutritional stress with the fact there is still no grass, and the cost of feeding cows is pretty high.

Recall that at calving, the cow's nutritional needs are at their peak for the entire year. This includes a doubling of protein requirements (from about 1 pound of actual protein per day to about 2 pounds), and the energy needs go up by about 50 percent (and even more if the cow is in poor condition). The cost of feeding these cows is higher because almost all of it will be in stored feed and commercial supplements.

It is also the key time to find ways to lower costs, because there will be more money made in the

cattle business in the next few years by lowering costs than by any other factor.

Some of the things to do to help lower current feeding costs:

- Know how much the cow needs of the valuable (costly) nutrients such as energy and protein. There will be little gained by feeding beyond the needs.

- Know the quantity of the valuable (costly) nutrients in the feeds you are using so that feed is not wasted.

- Look hard for alternative sources. This may include food processing by-products or alternative grain feeds. Many of these feeds will work fine, but there may be less convenience than in going to the local feed source and pouring it out of a bag. You will have to decide what convenience is worth to you.

- Sort cows that have different nutritional needs. Cows that are calving later and yearling heifers

probably do not need the quality and quantity of feed needed by lactating cows, particularly young cows.

- Be sure the cows are healthy and free of parasites. There is no need to feed costly feed to worms.

- Make sure feeders are sufficient for the job. For grain feeding, it takes about 1 foot of bunk space per cow. Hay feeders vary widely in the amount of waste that results. For most ring-type feeders for big bales, waste is about 8 percent. The amount of feed you put in the feeder is never the same as the amount of feed the cows actually swallow.

**Marketing A Value-Added Feeder Calf**

Interest seems to be growing around the state in pooling feeder calves from several sources in an area that can be marketed as a group. This usually implies the calves will all have been handled the same way prior to sale.

I am often asked what is the list of practices that should be used for these calves. The following list should be useful in helping merchandise calves in this manner:

1. All calves have received vaccinations for IBR-BVD-PI3-BRSV, 5 strains of leptospirosis, H. Somnus, and 7-way clostridials. They should be boosted at least 2 weeks before sale. That sounds like a lot of shots, but each round can be given with just 2 needles.
2. Male calves castrated early, preferably with a knife.

3. Heifers guaranteed open.
4. All horns removed early.
5. All calves wormed and deloused.
6. All calves weaned for at least 2 weeks prior to sale. This is the hardest one for many small producers to do. Good health management, good facilities, and good feeding practices are essential in making it work.

7. Providing some accurate estimates of weight.

Some of the other factors that may help:

- Guaranteeing breed composition
- Using only performance-tested bulls as sires
- Implanting with growth promotants
- Providing calving dates and preweaning information.

If you are interested in pooling calves in your area, call your local extension office and let them know. We will be happy to work with breeders who may be interested in working together.

**WEANING RESULTS**

We have completed the analysis of the weaning trial conducted at Penn State last fall, and the results should be helpful to a good management and marketing program.

In this trial, we were testing whether there was an advantage in performance and health of feeder calves by weaning them early (146 days of age) and returning them to pasture, or weaning them at a more conventional age (200 days of age) and then returning them to pasture

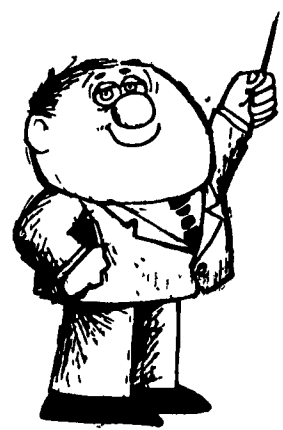
for two weeks, or simply weaning and shipping them to a feedlot on the same day.

The calves weaned at 146 days got off to a good start. They had an average daily gain of 1.9 pounds per day for the first 14 days after weaning compared to .98 pounds per day for those weaned at 200 days.

However, it was downhill after that for the early weaned group. Their weaning weights at 7 months of age were about 65 pounds lighter. Even considering lower cow maintenance costs since they were not nursing a calf, this difference in pay weight may be too much.

At about 7½ months of age, all three groups of calves were placed in a feedlot and fed the same pelleted diet for 28 days. Those calves weaned and shipped the same day had the lowest gains (1.66 pounds/day) and the lowest feed conversion (13 pounds of feed/pound of gain.) Somewhat surprisingly, the calves that had been weaned for more than two months did not gain as fast (2.14 pounds/day) as those weaned for only two weeks (2.74 pounds/day).

These results indicate that those who wish to develop a management and marketing plan that includes weaning before sale should consider a relatively short weaning period. While it was not an issue in this trial, a good vaccination program with boosters given ahead of weaning will be an important part of a successful program.



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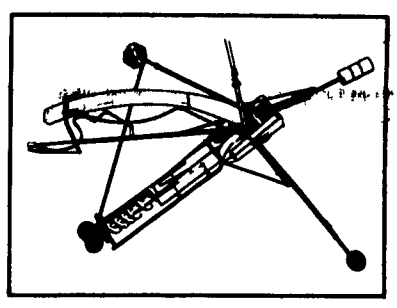
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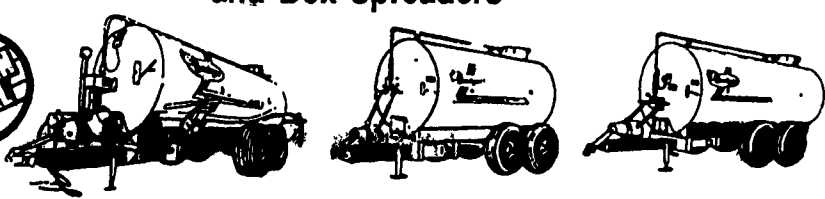
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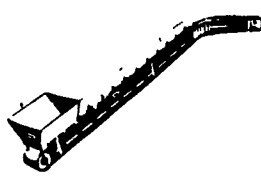
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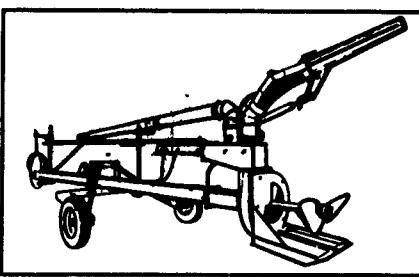
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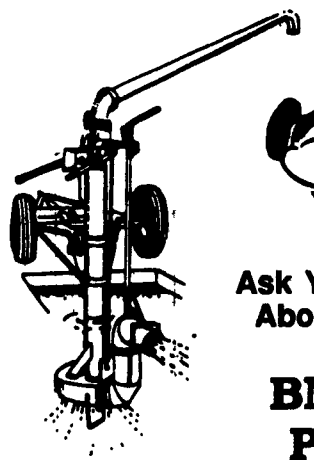


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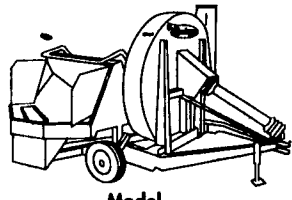
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