

Penn State Reports

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Penn State University researchers conducted trials to evaluate weaning behavior and growth performance in beef calves weaned early (four months) versus conventionally-weaned (seven months).

The trials were conducted over two years and involved 100 cross-bred (Angus x Simmental) cow/calf pairs.

Beef producers often transfer calves to a new location out of hearing and sight of the dams at

weaning time, which is thought to reduce weaning distress. Weaning distress was evaluated within this study by leaving half the dams within auditory and visual distance of the newly weaned calves (dams stayed) and relocating half the dams to a different farm (dams removed).

The calves were allotted to one of five treatments, including: 1) early-weaned, dams removed; 2) early-weaned, dams stayed; 3) conventionally-weaned, dams removed; 4) conventionally-

weaned, dams stayed; and 5) abruptly-weaned and placed immediately into a feed lot. The early- and conventionally-weaned calves were returned to fescue pasture for 77 days and 14 days, respectively.

The intent of returning calves to pasture was to reduce weaning distress caused by relocation, new ration composition, and different water source. One of the most common weaning management practices is to wean calves and immediately relocate the calves to a feedlot. Thus, 20 calves were also abruptly-weaned and placed in a feedlot at the same time the pasture-weaned calves arrived at the feedlot.

Twenty-eight day feedlot per-

formance was measured for early-, conventionally-, and abruptly-weaned calves. Calf distress was evaluated by recording behavioral activities such as vocalization, pacing, lying, standing, and grooming. In addition, white blood cell counts (WBC) and neutrophil:lymphocyte (N:L) ratios were used as indicators of calf distress levels. Feedlot performance was evaluated by average daily gain (ADG), feed efficiency (FE), and blood traits (WBC,N:L ratios).

The early-weaned calves had more distress vocalization and paced more than the conventionally-weaned animals. This demonstrates the dam-calf bond is stronger at four months of age than at

seven months. This stronger bond is probably the reason calf distress is greater in early-weaned calves.

Regardless of weaning age, calves that were weaned within visual and hearing distance of their dams definitely vocalized more than calves located on a different farm from their dams. However, after the third day, calves close to their dams appeared more relaxed and vocalized less than calves with the dams removed. Calves with dams removed continued to exhibit distress traits until the sixth day. Keeping the dams within hearing and visual distance of the calves apparently shortened the time of distress following weaning.

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NFO Proposed Pork Plan To USDA

AMES, Iowa — National Farmers Organization proposed a pork recovery plan to USDA designed to provide relief to America's hog producers.

Phase one of the independent hog producer recover plan calls for USDA to purchase hogs directly from pork producers and donate them to relief agencies.

"This program would not only provide help to those in need, but also assist hog producers who are laboring under record low prices," said National Farmers Organization President Gene Paul. Prices hog producers receive have plummeted to 26-year lows.

Record low pork prices combined with record high hog inventories present a monumental industry program. Currently producers receive approximately \$40 for a 245-pound hog. Comparatively, retailers gross about \$330 for the same animal. USDA now estimates a \$144 million loss per week for pork producers.

"The USDA should step in and help pork producers in their hour of need, as they have in the past with other farm commodities," said Paul. Independent hog producer losses are becoming catastrophic, and a combination of industry and government efforts can provide necessary relief to the pork industry.

Beef Early Weaning Research

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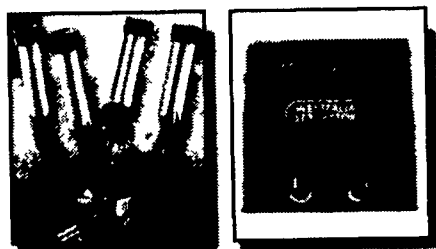
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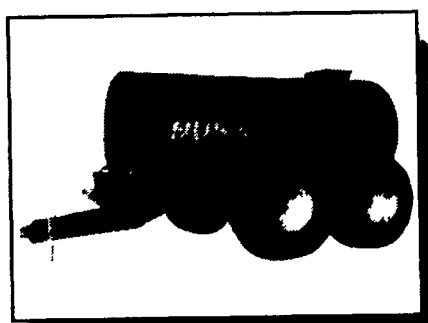
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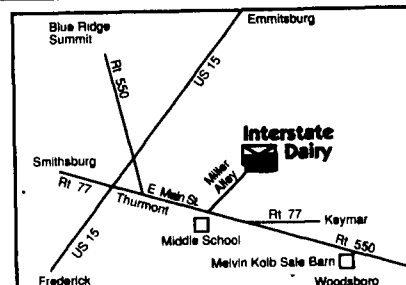
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