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The early-weaned calves had lower ADG from weaning to the feedlot than conventionally-weaned calves. However, other research has shown ADG can be similar to conventionally-weaned animals when early-weaned calves are supplemented with grain. The conventionally-weaned animals which were returned to

pasture for 14 days had a higher ADG postweaning, and for the first 28 days in the feedlot, than the early-weaned animals. However, feedlot ADG for the first 28 days of both the early- and conventionally-weaned calves were higher than abruptly-weaned, 7-month-old calves. There was no difference between treatment groups for feed intake in the feedlot.

Blood parameters did not demonstrate a difference in stress levels between the weaning age groups. Therefore, one weaning method was not sufficiently different from the others to elicit a blood response which would indicate a difference in the amount of stress the calves experienced.

These results indicate that to minimize weaning distress, calves should be weaned at conventional

weaning ages. Dams should remain within visual and auditory proximity postweaning regardless if the calves are 4- or 7-months of age at weaning. However, certain economic and/or environmental conditions may make it advantageous to wean early.

Early-weaning will reduce the brood cow's feed consumption by approximately 20 percent, which may be beneficial during times of drought or reduced forage availability. Calf performance for the first 28 days following abrupt-weaning and immediate relocation to a feedlot was lower than for calves preconditioned on a pasture system before entering the feedlot.

The abruptly-weaned calves are

affected by weaning distress (relocation, ration changes, water location and quality changes, breaking of maternal bond, etc.) for six days or more following weaning. Fourteen days on a pasture system may be sufficient for healthy calves to maintain weaning weights and improve early feedlot performance.

This project was conducted by D.L. Smith, D.L. Wiggers, L.L. Wilson, J.W. Comerford, H.W. Harpster, and E.H. Cash and received research funds administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and Penn State University appropriations.

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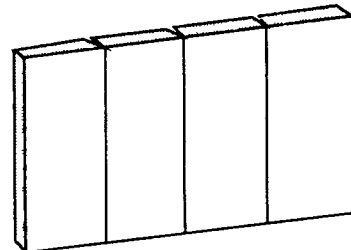


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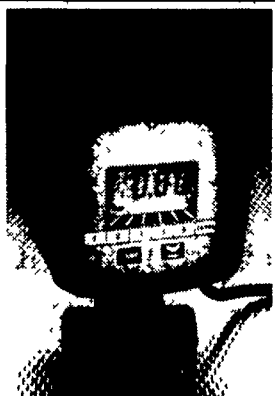
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