

Consider Weaning Calves Born In Late Winter And Early Spring



DR. JAMES B. NEEL

KNOXVILLE, TENN.

Cow-calf producers should consider the option of weaning the calf crop born in late winter or early spring. Most producers do not wean their calves because they have considered it to be a bothersome practice. Others may say, "I want my calves to gain more weight," or, "I want my cows to work for nine months." But there are many factors that cow-calf producers should consider when evaluating the option of weaning. Following are some that might make weaning an attractive option to improve profitability.

- **The forage supply usually becomes limited during July and August.** Tennessee's cow-calf industry is based on utilizing fescue, and it is at its lowest quality during these months. Weaning calves will help to provide more forage for the cows. It will reduce the stocking rate and "dry up" the cows. With the milk production being almost nonexistent in cows calving in late winter/early spring, it will reduce the cows' nutrient requirements and as a result, their pasture needs, thereby stretching the grazing available for the cows. Dry cows will consume less forage than those that are nursing calves. They will consume about 2 percent of their body weight, while those lactating will consume about 2.5 percent of their body weight.

- **As a result of the calves being weaned and the cows' nutrient needs reduced, the cows will gain weight and should be in a better body condition.** An improved body condition score (BCS) at calving will aid in a stronger calf at birth and both an improved volume and qual-

ity of colostrum for the newborn calf. With an improved BCS, the cows will also have a shorter post-partum interval and breed back earlier than if they were in a thin condition at calving.

- **The beef cows' milk production is at a low level during July and August.** Milk production of the cows is at its highest about 60 days following calving and declines thereafter to its lowest level during these months. Therefore, the nutrients the calf gets from the milk does little to produce adequate gain.

- **Weaned calves will make efficient use of a concentrate ration.** They will convert feed at a rate of 3.5 lbs. feed to 1 lb. of gain. They will also make respectable gains. Summer 2002 "On the Farm" demonstrations conducted in Tennessee with weaned calves produced gains ranging from 1.72 lbs. per day to 2.95 lbs. per day (Rawls, Emmit). The results of these demonstrations show that it can pay to wean calves and feed them for 45 days prior to marketing.

- **In addition to weaning and feeding, the calves should be exposed to a recognized health and management program that also will add value.** The best way to receive the full value gained by weaning and feeding the calves and the health program is to market through a graded feeder calf sale. Weaning calves is an option that cow-calf producers should consider. The practice not only has a positive impact on the market weight value of the calves, but it also aids in stretching the pasture and/or forage availability, improves the condition of the brood cows, and results in improved reproductive performance of the brood cows. Δ

DR. JAMES B. NEEL: Professor of Animal Science and Extension Beef Cattle Specialist, University of Tennessee



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