



BEEF CATTLE TIME

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Make Preparations for Marketing Feeder Calves this Fall

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Professor - Animal Science

Will your calves be ready to market at the designated time this fall? To answer yes to this question, several management practices must be performed for the calves to sell for the most money.

The first management practices that must be completed are castrating and dehorning. Market reports continue to show that steer calves sell for more than bulls, and calves without horns sell for more than calves with horns. The difference between bulls and steers continues to be \$5 to \$7 per 100 pounds. This amounts to a discount of \$25 to \$35 for bulls compared to steers. Horned calves generally sell for \$1.50 to \$2 per 100 pounds less than calves with horns.

The next step in preparing for fall marketing is completing the requirement for a marketing program available in your area. Many producers are marketing their calves through Process Verified Programs (PVP). This process involves recordkeeping to verify birth dates plus a health and weaning program. Most of the programs require a prescribed set of vaccinations be given during a specific time period. Calves are also weaned and provided supplemental feed.

Calves that have been preconditioned are less likely to get sick after marketing and will start eating immediately after arrival at the stocker or finisher operation. Fewer problems allow buyers to pay more for these calves and thus increase the total income from the calf crop.

Now is the time to identify the market where the calves will be marketed. Contact the market operator to learn what must be done for the calves to qualify for the sale. Start the

preconditioning program early enough so the calves will be ready for the sale date.

Should Cattle Producers Stockpile Fescue This Year?

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Should cattle producers consider stockpiling fescue this fall? If it appears that there will be enough moisture to sustain growth, then the answer is definitely yes.

The bigger question may be how many acres should be set aside for stockpiling. Producers should inventory their hay supplies to determine how much additional feed will be needed. Short hay supplies may indicate the need for extra acreage of stockpiled fescue or fewer numbers of animals.

Stockpiling fescue is a relatively simple process. Step one is to closely graze the field to be stockpiled. This step should be completed by mid-August so the fescue plants can regrow. Next, the fields should be fertilized with 60 units of nitrogen per acre. The optimum time to fertilize is mid-August to the first of September. After fertilization, keep the cattle off the field until the first frost or later.

Make plans to efficiently utilize the stockpiled fescue. Use temporary electric fences to allow animals only a limited amount of the forage at one time. Make the animals consume the available forage before moving them into another area. The concept is to minimize the amount of forage wasted. Allowing animals free access to all of the fescue will allow trampling of quality forage. (See the accompanying article by Dr. Gary Bates.)

Overseeding Tall Fescue with Winter Annuals

Gary Bates

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The largest expense in cow-calf production is winter feed, and hay production is one of the most costly operations on most farms across the Southeast. Most producers realize the expense, and are attempting to reduce the feed cost.

One way to accomplish cost reduction is to decrease the amount of hay fed by lengthening the grazing season. One method used to lengthen the grazing season is stockpiling tall fescue. The forage produced by fescue during the fall is very high quality, and the nutrients are maintained in the forage for an extended period of time. Applying nitrogen in the early fall increases the yield, and provides forage that can be utilized during the late fall and winter to reduce the winter feed bill.

Producers sometimes use winter annuals to provide winter and spring grazing on cropland or on dormant bermudagrass pastures. Some producers seed these winter annuals into tall fescue pastures, thinking that the winter annual will provide more fall and winter grazing than will the tall fescue, which should result in a longer winter grazing season.

UT forage specialists have investigated the effect of drilling winter annuals into tall fescue on forage yield. Researchers drilled wheat and annual ryegrass into tall fescue on two dates. 'FFR 522' wheat and 'Ribeye' annual ryegrass were seeded either early (mid-September) or late (mid-October). Within each of these seeding treatments, plots were assigned to one of three fall nitrogen treatments (0, 60 or 90 lb. N/acre). All plots were fertilized with 80 lb. N per acre in spring, along with phosphate and potash.

Plots were harvested in the fall and twice in the spring. The first spring harvest was completed considerably earlier than normal hay harvest. This early harvest was done to evaluate the early spring growth of the treatments, which would indicate which were best for providing early season growth to decrease the late winter hay needs.

The design of the experiment allowed for the following comparisons: (1) effect of seeding date on forage yield, (2) effect of species seeded on forage yield, and (3) effect of fall nitrogen rate on forage yield.

Results of the Study

To look at objective 1, all overseeding treatments were compared at the 60 lb. N per acre fertilization rate

(Table 1), the recommended rate during fall. Results indicate that the overseeding treatments of both species did not improve the yield of tall fescue. There was a trend for the late overseeding treatment of both species to produce less yield than early overseeding or tall fescue that was not overseeded.

Table 1. Effect of overseeding tall fescue on fall and early spring yield.

Overseeding Treatment	12/05/01	3/15/02
	----- lb. DM/acre-----	
None	1142	1445
Early Ryegrass	1013	402
Wheat	824	1010
Late Ryegrass	790	432
Wheat	724	434

All plots fertilized with 80 lb. N at planting and late February.

The data in Table 1 indicates that only the information from the tall fescue without overseeding and the early seeding treatments should be considered for the rest of the discussion. With this in mind, Table 2 shows the effect of fall N rate on early winter forage yield. The data indicated that overseeding did not improve fall yield. Fall yield was influenced by N rate, not overseeding species. Yields were relatively low, but the highest yields were obtained with the higher N rates.

Table 2. Effect of overseeding and fall N application on fall harvest of tall fescue (yield in lb. DM/acre).

Overseeding Treatment	Fall N Application (lb. N/acre)		
	0	60	90
None	762	1142	1445
Ryegrass early	687	1013	1050
Wheat early	602	824	1010

Harvested 12/05/01.

The fall N application influenced spring harvest, also (Table 3). The late March harvest indicates how early forage will be available for grazing in the spring. The data indicates that the overseeding did not improve yield, but the fall N rate did. Applying N in the fall allows tall fescue to produce more forage as well as store more carbohydrates in the roots and crown. This extra carbohydrate storage provides more energy for the plant to begin to grow in spring.

Table 3. Effect of overseeding and fall N application on early spring harvest of tall fescue (yield in lb. DM/acre).

Overseeding Treatment	Fall N Application (lb. N/acre)		
	0	60	90
None	296	448	578
Ryegrass early	295	402	502
Wheat early	286	402	484

All plots fertilized with 80 lb. N in late February. Harvested 3/15/02.

Conclusions

These results indicate that the best fall and early spring yield can be obtained through fall fertilization of tall fescue rather than seeding winter annuals into the tall fescue. If the stand of tall fescue is weak and does not have enough grass plants to provide adequate growth, then overseeding with wheat can bulk up the stand and provide more plants for growth. Overseeding is only a short-term fix, and eventually the stand of tall fescue will need to be reseeded to increase plant population.

What Is a Brand Anyway?

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What should a brand imply to a customer? Webster's Dictionary defines a brand as "a trademark, a class of goods identified by name as the product of a single firm or manufacturer, or a distinctive kind." "Brand name," the adjective, means having a reputation and a loyal following. Brands can imply good or bad things depending on the situation. The phrase "Southeastern cattle," when used in cattle-feeding country, implies calves gathered over a period of days from weekly auctions; of unknown genetics, health and management protocol; and expected to have higher sickness and death loss. Those factors plus the freight are the reasons our auction prices are lower than those closer to the feedlots most times of the year.

To me, a brand implies credibility, integrity or an expectation that if the product is purchased it is something special, i.e., not generic, and will give me the same performance or satisfaction if purchased again. If all a buyer knows about your cattle is the color, weight, sex and grade, then you should not expect nor do you deserve more than the average market price.

We have had several efforts over the years to establish a brand or label for preconditioned feeder cattle. My first recollection was the TNT program, or Tennessee and Treated. Unfortunately, the label TNT had other implications with which people were more familiar. Later, several Southeastern states had a variety of state programs,

carrying their own brand or label. The NCBA region made a major effort to come up with a program for different levels of preconditioning. The Blue Tag cattle were fully preconditioned, with double vaccination for respiratory and blackleg, weaned at least 30 days, castrated, dehorned and taught to eat from a trough and drink from a tank. The Red Tag program required all of the above except weaning, and the White Tag program only required one round of vaccinations and did not require weaning. The program had only modest success. South Carolina still uses the designations in a few sales. Georgia does not use it at all. In Tennessee, only Sweetwater uses the brand or label, and that sale has additional requirements. It requires the Blue Tag level, is animal health product-brand specific, requires 45 days of weaning, and a few other items requested by buyers. It moved to this Southeast Pride Plus level because the regular Southeast Pride Blue Tag program did not work for buyers.

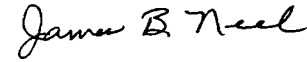
Other groups in the state currently have programs that attempt to establish their brands, in the hope that buyers will try the cattle, be fully satisfied and become repeat buyers. The Tennessee Beef Alliance has a program that includes some genetic specifications. Some of the cattle in the Sweetwater Southeast Pride Plus sale have genetic requirements. The Hawkins County Cattleman's Association sale is brand specific for its vaccination program and requires 45-day weaning. The Hereford Alliance sale in the fall is breed specific, but also has specific preconditioning requirements. Athens and McMinnville also have one or more preconditioned sales each year. In addition, there are animal health companies that have their own preconditioning programs, such as Sure Health and Select Vac. If I have left any sale out it is not by intent.

Another program is the Process Verified Program (PVP). Its purpose is to verify the age and source of feeder cattle so that the beef from those cattle will qualify for export to Japan. Following the BSE (mad cow) case in 2003 – and after much negotiation – Japan only accepts beef from cattle 21 months and younger. The Tennessee Department of Agriculture has made available funds to producers and markets who hold preconditioned sales for PVP cattle. It is my understanding that some of those cattle might have been preconditioned and PVP for age and source, but were nothing special otherwise. In my opinion, buyers expect something special from cattle that are age and source verified. However, it is only human nature for folks to run to the money when such programs are made available no matter how good the intent of the program.

The situation begs the question, "Why can't Tennessee have a program like Kentucky's Certified Preconditioned for Health (CPH) sales, or a VAC 45 program?" I think there would be some benefit in having a recognizable brand. One brand would not have to take away from the uniqueness of alliance-specific or breed-specific programs. There are differences among Kentucky's CPH sales, but the CPH sales do have a set of standards which apply to all. It comes down to a need to work together, decide what is important, and come up with a recognizable brand with basic standards. Then individual groups, alliances, associations, etc., can add special requirements. It will take more than meetings and catchy names to accomplish the task. It will require commitment.

The market is crying out for feeder cattle of known reputation which will stand up under customary stocker and

feedlot programs and perform with a great degree of repeatability. We want those buyers to be the last bidder or next to the last bidder on our Tennessee cattle. As many groups have learned, load lot numbers are critical to capturing full value for any cattle. Anything less than 48,000 pounds will not get the job done. Producers will need to work together to convince the doubters that any such program and sale is the thing to do. Help is available from UT Extension, TDA and others if we are to create a brand to market quality feeder cattle that meet buyer expectations. Beef producers can have some control of the value received for their cattle if they become committed to do so.



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Beef Cattle Time

From:

Leader/Agent

Visit the UT Extension Web site at
<http://www.utextension.utk.edu/>

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