

LOW COST COW/CALF PROGRAM

The Bulletin For Alumni Of The School

Volume 8

Number 3

Basketball Program

The U of AZ has a top-tier basketball program. A major component is the recruitment of young (17 to 18 yrs old) high school graduates. The transition from high school and state hero to a bench sitter or redshirt player in college is tough. To facilitate the transition, it is common for mom to pack up her belongings and move to Tucson. The move is encouraged by the athletic department and the university and does not violate NCAA sanctions. The coaches require the plebe to reside in a campus dorm for his freshman year and participate in student activities. Mom's house is where you find the finest restaurant in town. It is where the kid goes after having a tough day in class and having received some indignant comments from his basketball peers and coaches. A tear from a near-man is OK here. Hugs are plentiful and now a man returns to his campus room, knowing that it will turn out for the best. Rejuvenated and with fresh laundry, he is ready to get it on. The university endorses the apron-strings relationship because the kid performs better academically. The coaches like it because the kid is more likely to stick it out and become a star player. The gymnasium is sold out and TV revenues are high. And where is mom's house? It is just a short drive away; you could say, just across the fence.

Fenceline Weaning

With very few exceptions, calves are artificially weaned from their mothers. No mom, no milk, a change in diet and a new home. Distress? Big time! The U of California¹ recently reported on a study that involved fenceline weaning. The study was replicated over time (years '98, '99 and '00). Oct born calves were weaned in May, at an average age of 213 d and weighing 455 lb. In each year, two groups of 10 calves were assigned to each of the following treatments: 1) nonweaned controls on pasture (C-P), 2) fenceline separation on pasture (F-P), 3) total separation

on pasture (S-P), 4) pairs preconditioned with alfalfa hay in drylot for 10 d just prior to total separation (S-D-P), 5) total separation and placed in drylot w/o preconditioning (S-D-NP). Fences separating the calves and cows in the F-P group were five strands of barbed wire covered with netting. These treatments were administered for only 7 d following weaning. After d 7, the calves were pooled and went to pasture. The C-P calves were weaned at 56 d.

Behavior

Percentage of observations in which calves were exhibiting various behaviors on d 1 - 3.						
Variable/d	C-P	F-P	S-P	S-D-P	S-D-NP	
Eating	1	42.4	43.9	25.9	33.7	19.2
	2	35.1	31.7	20.7	19.8	18.0
	3	46.0	36.2	24.6	33.2	27.2
Pacing	1	12.5	10.2	26.5	12.1	17.0
	2	7.8	11.1	34.2	12.3	18.6
	3	5.4	9.2	23.6	4.4	9.0
Lying	1	27.9	21.9	11.4	11.4	7.0
	2	21.9	23.1	14.0	20.4	21.4
	3	18.9	24.8	22.5	34.0	33.4
Bawl/hr	1	0.1	117.1	466.7	218.6	453.0
	2	0.2	425.8	587.9	663.3	777.3
	3	0.1	107.2	249.2	231.8	324.2

A whole bunch of people observed these cattle for two hours each at 8, 12 and 4 o'clock. Behavior was recorded for individuals every 60 s. "Vocalization" was measured as a group thing. Results are shown in the table above. The C-P and F-P calves spent about the same time eating, which was considerably more than the other calves. The C-P calves did a lot of pacing on the day of weaning, even though the cows and calves were divided into treatment groups 10 days in advance. Did noise from the other calves disturb them? Overall, fenceline weaned calves behaved comparably to the nonweaned calves except for bawling. Behavior of the F-P calves occurred in synchrony. The calves left the fenceline to graze in a group and returned to stand or lie down near the fence as a group. The dams followed a similar pattern.

Performance

Post-weaning performance of the calves reflects the observed behavior, as indicated in the following table. (Data from '99 were excluded because of a pinkeye outbreak). The F-P calves performed every bit as well as the nonweaned calves for the

Average weight gain of calves at 2 and 10 wk postweaning.						
Wk/Yr	C-P	F-P	S-P	S-D-P	S-D-NP	
	Past	Past	Past	Lot	Lot	
2 wk, '98		56	58	42	36	31
	2000	32	36	17	11	8
	Mean	44	47	30	23	20
10 wk, '98		136	99	86	79	84
	2000	150	121	97	80	79
	Mean	143	110	91	80	82

first 2 wk. The completely separated calves did not gain nearly as well as the C-P and F-P calves during the 2-week period after weaning. Further, they did not catch up by 70 d post weaning. Winning the contest were the calves that remained with mom for an additional 56 d. Our recommendation always has been to terminate lactation in time for the cow to achieve condition prior to calving. No earlier, depending upon the cow's BCS. If you've gotta wean, then go fenceline.

Rumors

Many producers think that a 90% conception is good but we are weaning >96%. I thank God for sending you, Dick Diven, to open my mind and eyes. My best to you, Kent Hunter Wyoming

Schools In 2003

Pierre, SD August 12 - 15

Dick Diven

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¹ Price, E.O., J.E. Harris, R.E. Borgwardt, M.L. Sween and J.M. Connor. 2003. Fenceline contact of beef calves with their dams at weaning reduces the negative effects of separation on behavior and growth rate. J. Anim. Sci. 81:116.