BEEFnews
NEW ENGLAND & NORTH WEST SLOPES

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A quarterly newsletter for beef producers of the New England and North West Slopes areas of NSW.

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NSW DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

Are your cattle feedlot ready?

Alastair Rayner, Livestock Officer (Beef Products), GLEN INNES

Sending cattle to a feedlot for finishing is becoming a more common marketing option for producers. However, while feedlot operators need to buy cattle, they prefer to buy cattle which suit their program and their target markets.

This puts responsibility back onto producers. Sending cattle to a feedlot should be part of a program which covers all the basics, and ensures your cattle are feedlot ready.

There are two major areas where producers can have an impact on producing feedlot ready cattle. These are the healthiness of their cattle and ensuring that cattle suit the feedlot.

Cattle become sick in feedlots as a result of two reasons. The first is their immune system cannot cope with the challenges posed by the feedlot. Common disease such as *Bovine Respiratory Disease (BRD)* can affect cattle, and can cause losses of up 10 times the normal rate of a feedlot.

Cattle which are unused to feeding from troughs or bunks can also lead to significant health problems. These animals often succumb to *Gastro-Intestinal Disease*. This can include animals which have bloat, acidosis, or alkalosis.

Stress also has a significant effect on an animal's immune system. Highly stressed cattle, such as those with poor temperaments, or that have been excessively handled or transported can have immune system breakdowns, making them more vulnerable to disease attacks.

Yard weaning is an easy way for producers to help boost the immune system of their cattle. Yard weaning exposes young

YARD WEANING TIPS

Use secure, well drained yards
Keep calves in the yards for 7 – 10 days
Allow access to clean drinking water
Provide good quality hay or silage in hay racks
Teach to eat from troughs if possible
Some interaction daily is also beneficial

cattle to pathogens, which allows them to develop resistance to disease such as BRD, long before they enter a feedlot.

Yard weaning also provides young cattle with experience in feeding from bunks and troughs, as well as learning to feed with a large number of cattle. This education helps prepare young cattle for feedlot life, and can reduce stress and sickness levels when the cattle enter the feedlot.

Pre vaccinating cattle is a strategy many producers are also considering. A commercial vaccination is now available which can used to reduce losses experienced with BRD. This vaccination program should be discussed with your veterinarian. However combining vaccination and yard weaning is a successful strategy to reduce feedlot health problems.

It is also important that producers don't use a feedlot as an opportunity to off load cull animals. The only animals that should be sent for grain finishing are those which meet the specifications for weight, age, maturity pattern and fat score. Animals which are out of specification end up costing the feedlot operator money, and result in operators avoiding those cattle in the future.

Would you like more Beef Information!

There is a lot of out there so to save yourself time here is a list of websites that you may want to select some "favourites" from. To see and download the Useful Cattle Websites list click on the link below.

Getting Your Pasture Mix Right

Carol Harris, Research Agronomist, Glen Innes

The good rain received by most over the summer months has provided promising conditions for sowing pastures in the autumn. Many of you are probably in the process of finalising your pasture mixes so what is the ideal pasture mix?

A balanced grass and legume pasture is required for livestock production with the ideal for most cases being 60-70% grass and 30-40% legumes. The grasses and legumes contribute differently to the performance of the pasture. The legume benefits the pasture by fixing nitrogen, promoting vigorous grass growth and increasing the quality of the pasture. The grass benefits the pasture through increased yield, a more even seasonal production pattern, reducing livestock disorders e.g bloat, reducing weed invasion, soil acidification and soil erosion as well as providing long term stability.

As a general rule pasture mixes recommended to maximise production on the Northern Tablelands contain 2-3 grasses with 1 or 2 legumes. Such mixtures are preferred as they provide greater continuity of feed throughout the year and greater production where conditions are variable i.e. changes of soil type, aspect and fertility within a paddock and changes to seasonal conditions from year to year.

Factors to consider when deciding on species and varieties to use in a pasture mix include;

Soils: soil type, soil pH, drainage, salinity and fertility can all be determining factors in pasture species choices. In paddocks where soil type often changes it is valuable to increase the number of species as opposed to a simple mixture of 1 grass and 1 legume to cover the variability. Within paddock differences of soil pH can be dealt with by including an acid tolerant species to cover areas of low pH in an otherwise neutral soil. Species tolerant to waterlogging can be included in the mixture to provide coverage in parts of the paddock that are poorly drained.

Enterprise: the pasture mix needs to meet the requirements of the livestock enterprise with respect to quantity, quality and animal grazing habit.

Aspect: western aspects in the paddock will often be drier and be more difficult for some species and varieties. The pasture mix will benefit from the inclusion of a hardy persistent variety.

Plant characteristics: traits such as growth habit, seedling vigour, competitiveness and resistance to disease or insect pests should all be considered when deciding on species and varieties.

In the Glen Innes area pasture mixes for the heavy textured basalt soils traditionally contain the grasses tall fescue, phalaris and perennial ryegrass with white clover, lotus or red clover. However, pastures on granite and trap soils contain tall fescue, cocksfoot, and perennial ryegrass with similar legume choices. Modifications may be necessary to these mixes according to local paddock conditions and requirements.

Editorial

Alastair Rayner, Livestock Officer (Beef Products) GLEN INNES

Welcome to this first electronic edition of Beef News for the New England & North West Slopes. I have been enthusiastic about preparing a newsletter which contains a good range of new research, handy hints and some suggestions which are useful for beef producers across the region.

Like any new venture, this one may evolve over time. Any ideas or suggestions on content or articles are more than welcome.

The general plan will be for the newsletter to come out on a quarterly basis, and I plan to have articles which relate to the annual cattle program. I'll also try and give some early warning of any activities and field days which may interest or hopeful even excite the regions beef producers!

Coming Events

There always seem to be plenty of event coming up. The key events for the next few months include:

- Beef-n-omics. Beef-n-omics is a training course which is carried out over three days or six half days. The course has a mix of practical and theory. A key component of the course is the use of a computer model which creates an estimate for the groups case study properties' feed availability, livestock feed demands and calculates gross margins. It allows producers to compare the impact of new technologies on the case study. Interested producers can register to the Glen Innes office of DPI on 02-6730 1900 or through PROfarm on 1800 628 422

- PROGRAZE. Prograze is an eight segment workshop run over 8 half days on farm. The course is designed to teach skills in assessing pasture quality & quantity; improve grazing management decisions and match livestock and pastures. Each course has space for 18 producers. If you are interested in learning to get more from your pastures, contact the Glen Innes office of the DPI on 02-6730 1900 or register through PROfarm on 1800 628 422.

- Beef Improvement Association Annual Conference

The Beef Improvement Association of Australia will be holding their annual national conference in Tamworth on the 26th of July. Key note speakers will cover issues from genetic technologies for beef producers to making better supplementary feeding decisions. The conference is a great opportunity to update information as well as improve your

industry network. For more information contact the BIA on 03-5341 7700.

Have you planned for winter?

This autumn the season across the region is extremely variable. The southern parts of the region are approaching drought conditions with very little rainfall, hot days and strong winds combining to restrict pasture growth to almost negligible levels. While in the north consistent storm activity during February and early March has seen pasture growth respond very well.

Each situation will pose special considerations as the days become shorter and colder. Winter is often a challenging time for cattle producers, and it is wise to plan early in order to make more timely management decisions.

Limitted Pasture Resource

Producers with limited pasture resources need to make plans for winter now. The key considerations will be the need for energy, particularly for calving cows. Key strategies should include:

- reducing numbers of cattle
- supplementary feeding

Reducing numbers is a key strategy. Many producers hang onto stock for too long. Selling cattle when they are in good condition and have not lost weight will ensure better returns.

Supplementary feeding is often an expensive exercise. To obtain the most efficient feeding program, producers must consider what the key limitation for livestock is. In situations where pasture is lacking, the key limitation is energy. The most useful feeds will be energy supplements such as grains. It is also vital to have some roughage on hand, particularly for wet cold periods.

Early planning allows producers to develop strategies for both reducing numbers and obtaining feed supplies when prices are still reasonable.

Dry Standing Feed

For those areas where there has been good pasture growth, the key consideration is to use the feed which has been grown. Mostly this will be tall stands of dead and medium digestibility pasture. In these situations the limitation for livestock will be a lack of protein.

Protein is important for rumen activity, and when this is provided animal intake increases, which leads to better feed utilisation.

Pre planning for winter in these areas should include:

- reducing numbers
- supplementary feeding with a protein source

Appropriate supplements include protein sources such as white cottonseed, protein meals, molasses and urea mixes or grain lupins.

In all situations, the key requirement for producers is to make some plans, including cut off dates for action. Once the plans are made, the important issue is to stick to the plan.

For advice on planning or other winter management issues, feel free to contact the office on 02-6730 1900. General advice, including feeding recipes can also be found on the DPI web site, *www.dpi.nsw.gov.au*