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Calculating Creep Feeding

As we move into the summer of 2019 we seem to be repeating 2018 to some measure. We have seen delayed planting and delays in making dry hay. We know from the past year, and other research that grass hay that over matures will not be the best feed come winter. With that thought, many have reported that their calf crop in 2018 was not the best they have had in recent years. Calves just didn't seem to grow as well as normal in Southern Ohio. This might not be the case for everyone, but everyone's operation is a little different, some may creep feed, some may feed the cows, some no feed. These are all different situations, but so are numbers. Some may have 20 cows on 100 acres while others may have 50 cows on a similar 100 acres.

As we move forward the thought of creep feeding may be one of the things that may have helped the 2018 calf crop. There are many pros and cons to creep feeding. Dr. Francis Fluharty, former Beef Nutrition Specialist with OSU Extension, taught that the feed would provide more bang for your buck if you fed the cow.

Francis explained that the nursing calf will nurse all that is in the cow regardless of how much feed is provided by creep feeding. The cow may need more nutrients, too. This would especially be the case in a year that is drought like, or a year like last year that saw so much rain in some areas that the grass was poor quality feed.

The following is copied from the Beef Blog and is from Dr. Glenn Selk of Oklahoma State University Extension. This information has been in several publications as stated below.

Calculating the pros and cons of creep feeding.

Feed conversions of calves fed creep have been quite variable to say the least. Conversions of 5:1, or 5 pounds (lb.) of grain consumed to 1 lb. of extra calf weight, are very rare and the optimum that can be expected using a "typical" high-energy creep feed. Conversions may be as poor as 15:1 (or worse) in some situations. Several factors affect the amount of

creep feed that is consumed for each additional pound of gain.

Cows that give large amounts of milk to their calves will provide enough protein and energy to meet the growth potential of their calves. In that scenario, the feed conversion from creep-feeding could be quite poor (10:1 or worse). If, however, the milk production of the cows is limited for any reason, the added energy and protein from the creep feed provides needed nutrients to allow calves to reach closer to their genetic maximum capability for growth. Calves from poor-milking cows may convert creep feed at a rate of about 7:1.

Poor milking can be a result of genetically low milk production or restricted nutritional status. Nutritional restriction due to drought situations often adversely affects milk production and, therefore, calf weaning weights.

Shortened hay supplies and reduced standing forage due to drought or severe winter weather often set the stage for the best results from creep-feeding.

These feed-conversion ratios become important when making the decision to buy and put out creep feed for spring-born calves. As you are calculating the cost of creep feeds, remember to include the depreciation cost of the feeders and the delivery of the feed. Then of course, it is important to compare that cost of creep-feeding to the realistic "value of added gain."

To calculate the value of added gain, determine the actual per-head price of the calf after the added weight gain (due to the creep feed). Then subtract the price per head if the calf were sold at the lighter weight (not fed creep). Divide the difference in dollars by the amount of added weight. Although 500-lb. steer calves may bring $1.80 per lb. at the market, and a 550-lb. steer brings $1.71 per lb., the value of added gain is about 80¢ per pound. Therefore, the estimated creep-feeding cost per pound of added gain must be less than 80¢ for the practice to be projected to be profitable.

Different ranching operations will come to different conclusions about the value of creep-feeding. In fact, different conclusions may apply to different groups of cows within the same herd. Creep-feeding may be more beneficial to calves from thin, young cows and less efficient for calves reared by mature cows that are in better body condition and producing more milk.

Editor's note: This article is reprinted with permission from the April 29 Cow-Calf Corner, *a newsletter published by the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, for which Glenn Selk is an emeritus extension animal scientist.*