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## Sort Cows for Efficient Winter Feeding

Over the years I have written about this subject a few times. This time I am going to let you read it from an expert, Dr. Glenn Selk, Beef Specialist at Oklahoma State University. Despite the fact feed is much cheaper than it has been the past few years, utilizing your feed dollars is still important to the bottom line. However, with the price of cull cows and feeder calves may be even more of a factor. Being able to keep cows in good body condition on both sides of your herd is important. By both sides, I mean the young and old cows. The middle aged cows need less attention as Dr. Selk will address.

First calf heifers have historically been the toughest females on the ranch to get rebred. They are being asked to continue to grow, produce milk, repair the reproductive tract, and have enough stored body energy (fat) to return to heat cycles in a short time frame. Two-year old cows must fill all of these energy demands at a time when their mouth is going through the transition from baby teeth to adult teeth.

If these young cows are pastured with the larger, mature cows in the herd, they very likely will be pushed aside when the supplements are being fed in the bunk or on the ground. The result of these adverse conditions for young cows very often is a lack of feed intake and lowered body condition. Of course, lowered body condition in turn results in delayed return to heat cycles and a later calf crop or smaller calf crop the following year.

North Dakota State University data of commercial cow herds recorded over a 21 year period illustrated the differences in size and body condition of very young cows and the very mature (10 year old+) cows. The North Dakota data clearly show that the average 2 year old is about 20 percent smaller than her full grown herd mates. There is little wonder that the younger cows get pushed away from feed bunks, hay racks, or supplements fed on the ground. The results of the size differences and the need to continue to grow are manifest in the lower body condition scores noted in the very young cows.

The very old cows are experiencing decline in dental soundness that make it difficult for them to maintain feed intake and therefore body condition. Over the 21 year data set from North Dakota, the 2-year old cows and the 11 year-old and older were significantly lower (0.3 or more units) in body condition score than middle-age cows. Consequently, it makes sense to sort very young cows with the very old cows and provide them with a better opportunity to compete for the feed supplies. By doing so, the rancher can improve the re-breeding percentages in the young cows and keep the very old cows from becoming too thin before culling time.

From this data one can formulate three logical groups of cows to be pastured together for feeding efficiency:

- Group 1: The two-year old first calf heifers. They have higher nutrient needs than other cows that are not growing. They are too small to compete with larger, older, boss cows for the supplement.
- Group 2: The old cows (10 years and older) and the 2nd calf heifers. In addition, this group should include any of the middle aged cows that were thin and needed extra supplement. Cows that were Body Condition Score 4 or less would be considered.
- Group 3: The remaining cow herd. This is the group that is mature in size and in adequate condition to enter the winter feeding period as at least Body Condition Score 5.

If only two groups are possible, putting groups 1 and 2 together would be the logical other combination. Ranchers, then want to be certain that the feeding program is adequate to have cows in each group calve as BCS 5 or 6 next spring.

## **Potential for Corn Ear Rot and Mycotoxin Problems in Ohio**

As we experienced a couple of years ago, this delayed harvest of the corn crop could cause some issues with ear rot and more. The following is from Dr. Pierce Paul, OSU Extension Specialist. Dr. Paul's entire article appears in this week's CORN Newsletter. The letter can be found at [corn.osu.edu](http://corn.osu.edu) or you can stop by the OSU Extension Office and we can print it out for you.

It is already the third week of October and most of the corn is still standing in the field. Some of the earlier-planted fields are being harvested, but at relatively high moisture levels. This is causing some concern among producers as to the potential for ear rot and mycotoxin problems. In fact, we have already received several samples of moldy ears from some fields, but so far the problem does not seem to be widespread, with only a few fields affected. Moreover, not every ear rot is associated with vomitoxin or other mycotoxin contamination of the grain. However, ear rots could potentially become more of a problem if it continues to rain and the corn remains in the field for an extended period.

Certain hybrids are more susceptible to one or more ear rots than others. Examine ears to determine the presence of ear molds. Make a note of which ear rots are present and hybrids that are most affected. Make future hybrid choices based on this information. Growers are advised to follow certain harvest and storage guidelines to minimize problems associated with kernel rots and mycotoxin contamination:

1. Harvest at the correct moisture and adjust harvest equipment to minimize damage to kernels. Mold and mycotoxins tend to be higher in (machine or insect) damaged kernels.
2. Dry harvested grain to 15% moisture and below to prevent further mold development in storage.
3. Store dried grain at cool temperatures (36 - 44F) in clean, dry bins. Moderate to high temperatures are favorable for fungal growth and toxin production.
4. Periodically check grain for mold, insects, and temperature.
5. If mold is found, send a grain sample for a mycotoxin analysis to determine if toxins are present and at what level. For more on moldy grain, mycotoxins, and mycotoxins sampling and analysis visit the following website: <http://ohioline.osu.edu/ac-fact/pdf/0052.pdf>.

## **Get Your Calendars Ready**

This is building up to a very busy winter meeting season. I am currently working on dates, times and locations for multiple meetings. These include a clean-up GAP meeting in the event someone might have missed the earlier trainings. GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) in this case is for Tobacco Producers. Go to [gapconnections.com](http://gapconnections.com) prior to the meeting and enter your information. The meeting is at the Adams Co. Extension Office on November 6 at 6:30 p.m.

I hope to have dates soon for next year's GAP training, Pesticide Applicator Re-certification, Farm Bill Meetings, and the new Fertilizer Applicator Certification that is a result of SB 150.