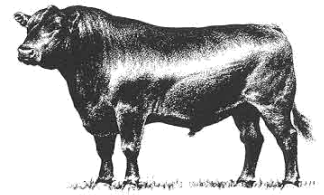




The Beef Bonanza

just shooting the bull



McDowell
county center

Fall 2018 Issue

NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Upcoming Events

- McDowell Cattlemen's Meeting-November 20th
- WNC Beef Conference and Bull Sale @ WNC Regional Livestock Center, Canton- Friday, December 7th

There will be a Cattlemen's meeting on November 20, 6:00 pm at Bethel Baptist Church, 205 Bethel Church Road, Marion. Please RSVP by the 16th to Heather Peek at 652-8104.

McDowell Cattlemen's Association Membership Dues

**\$20 per year (payable in January each year)
New Members are always WELCOME!**

Contact Us

NC COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION
McDowell Center

County Administration
Building, Room 226
60 East Court Street
Marion, NC 28752

Phone: 828-652-8104
Fax: 828-652-8104

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Dystocia

Written by: Adam Lawing

Dystocia, or calving issues can be a detrimental issue for cattle producers. It is estimated that 11% of heifers and 4% of cows need some assistance during calving season. Like many other management practices, it is easier to learn and prepare than it is to deal with the situation as it arises.

Dystocia is any delayed or difficult parturition and is the highest cause of death in calves less than 24 hours old. The hardest part about dystocia is that there is not just one factor that causes this. Factors can range from size, gender, presentation of the calf, body condition and the ability the cow is to give birth. The most common issue though is with 2 to 3 year old cows that are inexperienced and still growing, because they have a smaller pelvic area, making it tighter and harder to push the calf out.

Understanding the 3 stages of labor is critical. Cervical dilation, fetal expulsion (calving) and placenta expulsion. The deal here is that some cows naturally taking longer to get dilated before they can start calving. Knowing the signs and keeping a watch on cows during this process can help determine when or if assistance is needed. Typically heifers are allowed 2 to 3 hours in labor before assistance is needed where cows are given 3 or more. Once labor has started, be patient. Going in and assisting too early before the cervix had dilated completely can cause more harm to the cow than waiting a little longer. On the other hand if it is observed that the calf is positioned wrong, helping early can prevent losing that calf. In this case it is important to know the correct way a calf should be positioned in the uterus. Making sure that you have a head and 2 front feet is critical before give assistance to avoid harming the calf or cow. If you notice that there is an issue, it is important to have a vet on speed dial just in case.

Dystocia is more than just birthing difficulties. It also takes a toll on the cow and calf after the calving process. Calves are more likely to have symptoms of weakness and acidosis, increasing the chance of morbidity and mortality further down the road. There has been research found that assistance during calving had more positive effects on weight gain and weaning weights than calves not assisted. When looking at how it affects the cow, they may have trouble breeding back due to a longer postpartum interval. There could also be damages to her reproductive tract or uterine prolapses, which can cause more issues down the road.

So what can you do to reduce the chances of dystocia? Genetics and management practices are the two best ways to help. Utilizing EPD's (expected progeny differences) can be a big help. There is a calving ease section on bulls when looking at their EDP's. Calving ease direct EDP measures the percent of unassisted births from that bull. For this you would look for a bull with a higher number. Also looking at birth weights from the bull can help as well. Just remember not to go to extreme. Too high a calving ease number and too low of a birth weight is not always a good thing. This can lead to smaller calves, which in return could mean less value when sold by weight.

Measuring replacement heifers pelvic area can give an idea of which females could give issues. Pelvimeters are expensive and may not be a profitable investment on your operation. So, what you can do instead is simply look at your heifers and your cows. Visually looking at the width between their hook and pin bones can be a big help. Generally, the wider the hooks and pins are, the wider the pelvic bone is. If you notice that you have some replacements that are more narrow in their width than your other heifers, you may want to consider culling them.

Body condition score is something that you need to pay attention to all year round. During calving season, over conditioned cows can have issues with fat accumulation in the pelvis, making it more difficult for the calf to pass through the birth canal. If they are too skinny, there may be issues with the lack of energy resources for her and the calf.

Losing calves is never a good thing for any producer and sometimes you can lose a cow during the process as well. The least you can do is keep a check on your herds. Pay attention to the bull and the cows around breeding time so you can get an idea of when they may calve. Having a defined breeding season can also help so you know when you need to keep a check on them more often. If you are having issues with dystocia, think about your management practices and see if there could be anything you can do different to be more profitable.



What are Buyers Looking For?

I've heard and talked to other producers and a big question everyone has is what are buyers looking for and why did my calves bring 10 cents less than the other guys. I do not think there is an exact formula we can use to understand exactly what buyers are looking for, but I think that it boils down to a few main priorities, health, genetics, color and uniformity.

Health is important to buyers. They don't want to purchase cattle that are sick or more susceptible to getting sick. Industry statistics show that 1 out of 5 pens of calves sent to a feedlot will experience catastrophic loss. That is why they are careful on what they pay a premium for. From what I have read, health will always be the number one priority for buyers. Healthy cattle will perform much higher down the road. Good feeding programs and herd health programs together can improve the overall quality of your calves. Vaccinations is key in this situation. The average cost of vaccinating calves is around \$10 a head. Having proof that your calves have been vaccinated and the buyer knowing that, can help get you a higher premium. September and October is not a feedlot operators favorite months. For one they are receiving lots of cattle from the New Mexico area. Also they are dealing with seasonal sickness in calves. With warm days and cooler nights, their doctoring rates go from 15% to 80%. You should avoid weaning and selling during this time.

Selling bull calves rather than steers will also cost you money when it comes time to sell. Bulls generally have a \$15-\$25 hundredweight difference with calves larger than 550 pounds. If you figure an average of \$20 per hundredweight, you are looking at \$110 to \$150 less a head when you sell bull calves than selling steers. Horned cattle or calves with scurs (incomplete developed horns) also brings less at the stockyard, but is less of an issue in our area.



Feedlot buyers don't have too high of expectations on fat calves. By that time, most of their performance will be gone when compared to thinner cattle. With thinner cattle, they can expect some sort of gain out of those cattle and they try to catch up to their frame size.

Making you calves fill up on water before you haul them off is not a smart idea. Since you are selling them by weight, it may seem like a smart idea to get a couple more pound on them, but in reality it may be costing you more dollars. Buyers have to estimate how much shrinkage will occur on calves during the haul. Selling extra full calves, buyers will have to figure in more shrinkage and decreasing what they will pay for them.

Having quality cattle is never a bad thing to have. The easiest and quickest way to increase genetics is by buying or using better bulls. Buying a replacement heifer that is higher quality will still only produce one calf a year. In five years, that cow will only have influenced 5 calves. Buying a better bull on the other hand, in five years on 25 head will have influenced 125 calves. In the end, bulls have a larger impact than cows do. Good cattle will always bring a better price than average cattle.

Color is a big influence as well, but color isn't everything. Right now, customers want mainly black cattle. The issue here is color has nothing to do with quality. Just because you have black cattle doesn't mean they are high quality. The Certified Angus Beef brand is what has sparked this black trend I believe. Like I said before, good cattle will sell. Having a group of consistent good cattle that is consistent in color and size will bring you more money.

Here are some other tips to help get you more money. If you have heifers that could be bred, do not sell them as feeder calves. Feedlots do not like getting bred heifers. Instead get them preg checked and sell them as bred heifers.

Understand the importance of having a uniform shorter calving season. Not only will it make management easier, it will work to get you more uniform calves to sell.

Precondition calves may be more work, but in the end marketing with a program like Mountain Cattle Alliance will get you a higher premium.

Keep working on your genetics, use that to build your reputation in the cattle industry. Remember in the end, health is the number 1 priority when selling cattle. Keep improving your herd health program and genetics and I can assure you in the end, you will receive more money for your cattle!

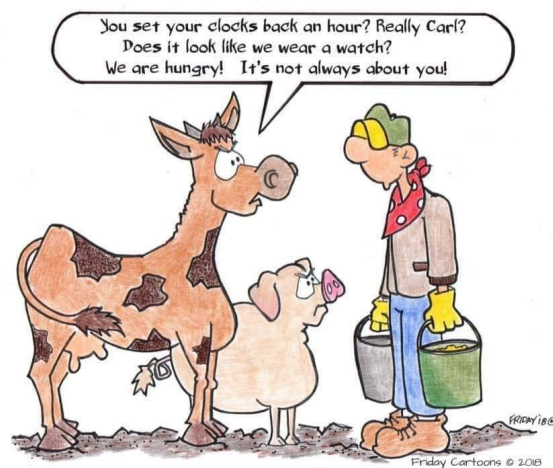




Compiled and edited by:

Adam Lawing
Extension Agent
Ag and Natural Resources

Administrative support provided by: Heather Peek



For accommodations for persons with disabilities, contact the McDowell County Center at 828-652-8104, no later than 10 business days before the event.