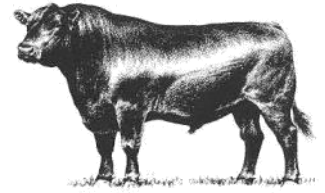




The Beef Bonanza

just shooting the bull



McDowell
county center

Spring 2019 Issue

NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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McDowell County Cattlemen's Meeting

**Tuesday, April 16th at 6:00 pm
Glenwood Ruritan Club**

**Please call the Extension Office at 828-652-8104
by Friday, April 12th to RSVP.**

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

Upcoming Events

- **April 13th Kathy Norman Memorial Jr. Horse Show**
- **August 2nd-3rd McDowell County Jr. Livestock Show**

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NC COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION



Making a Better Profit with Lower Prices

Written by: Adam Lawing

Economically, farming is hard for the small producer these days. Feed and hay prices are up. This past year it was hard to find hay with all the rain and what hay was available, cost a pretty penny in most cases. Cattle prices were not the best either. With all the high input costs, it has been hard to pencil out a breakeven or profit for most people. That is why it is important to keep records of costs and incomes and really think about how you can save money or make more money in the upcoming years.

The most obvious thing we all want to do, is to increase our cattle's performance. Feeding the cheapest feed may lower costs, but is it the best thing for your cattle? A lot of the time, cheaper feeds are made with cheaper ingredients that do not make our animals perform to their genetic potential. That is why we want to feed a high quality of feed or forage to our livestock. This will help increase average daily gain and milk production on our nursing cows. When grazing livestock, make sure they have plenty of forage in front of them. Don't let them pick the grass to the dirt then keep them there. Not only will that hurt your livestock's performance, it will also hurt your grass and pastures soil health. Increasing your calves average daily gain (ADG) can really make a difference on your operation. When your calves have a higher ADG, they will gain more pounds every day, making them ready for market faster, and reducing the number of days you feed them. While providing quality feedstuff for your cows, it will make it easier to keep them a body conditioning score (BCS) of 4-5 while lactating, which will help produce larger healthier calves that gain faster. It will also make it easier to put condition back on them after weaning, getting them back to a 6 or 6.5 BCS for breeding.

Lowering your production cost is a big concern for most producers. This will help offset lower sales prices and keep you more profitable. Forage is cheaper than grain. I think everyone can agree to that. With that being said, it should be your main priority to keep your pastures in the best shape you can. I'm not necessarily saying keep them weed free, because that can be expensive and hard to do, but some weeds are very palatable and have a good amount of nutrients. Focusing on your forage and soil health is what is important. Some of the easiest ways to do this is by keeping a watch on your stocking rate, not overgrazing and keeping your nutrient requirements monitored. Stocking rate and overgrazing go hand in hand and is normally the biggest issue producers face. It is important to maintain the right amount of cattle that our pastures and grass can handle. Generally, the rule of thumb is 1-2 acres per cow/calf pair for 1 year. However, there are some factors that can play in to this. The main one is how much grass you have available for them to eat and how much hay or grain supplements they will need. Knowing what your soil needs can help you save money and increase your forage production. For example, if you apply 350 pounds per acre of 19-19-19 every spring, but your analysis comes back only needing 250 lbs of 17-17-17 or just nitrogen and no potash or potassium, you are spending money on nutrients you already have. Soil samples are free from April to Thanksgiving and I am more than happy to come help you take them and analyze it so you know exactly how much fertilizer you need to put out. When you focus on forage quality, you are increasing the quality of every blade of grass that is eaten or baled. When you do that, every bite that is consumed has a higher amount of nutrients meaning the cattle will need to eat less of that forage. In return, the cost of energy or protein is reduced since less time, labor and resources are needed to produce per pound of nutrient.

Nutrient loss from incorrectly storing hay can cost producers more than you think. I have talked about hay storage more in-depth in past articles, so I won't go into much detail on this subject. Most nutrients are lost though the ground on hay so keep it off the ground with pallets or tires. Also keep it covered with a tarp to minimize the loss of nutrients. Lets say that you leave your hay outside and uncovered. Think about how much hay is moldy and black by the time you get around to feeding it. I found this in an article I was reading from Mississippi State, "In the eastern United States it is not unusual for 4 to 8 or more inches of spoilage to occur on the outside of large round bales stored outside with no protection. A weathered layer 6 inches in depth on a 5.6 foot x 5.6 foot bale contains about one-third of the package volume." When taking this size bale into consideration, it is going to weight about 1,650 lbs and 1/3rd of that is 550 lbs. If you do the math on having 100 bales stored outside, that is a total of 55,000 pounds of hay that is unfit to eat, or 34 5.5x5.5 bales of hay. It is good to know the nutrient value of your hay, since it's different from field to field. It only cost \$10 to analyze a sample, and I have a hay probe here in the office to do it with.

No matter which avenue you choose to sell or market your calves, everything you do prior to the sell date has a huge effect on how well your cattle and calves preform. In the end, marketing healthier and higher quality cattle is going to pay more on any day and buyers can tell which calves have been taken better care of. Profit margins can be tight, so it is up to you to decide how tight it is going to be. Saving a dollar here, might not be the smartest decision when it comes to your herd and pasture health.

Spring Pastures and Grass Tetany

Written by: Adam Lawing

Let's not lie, we all get a little excited when spring comes rolling around. Temperatures are rising and our pastures start to green up and grow. There is something that you need to be thinking about before you turn your cows and calves out on these lush green pastures. When grass starts growing rapidly, they have a high water content, this dilutes the amount of nutrients that are in the forage. The diluted nutrients makes it almost impossible for your livestock to eat enough forages to meet their nutrient requirements. It occurs mostly during the spring, but can occur in the fall and winter months as well.

The biggest issue with these high moisture, diluted nutrient grass is a condition called grass tetany. This is a metabolic disorder when livestock are deficient in magnesium (Mg). Cows that are in early lactation, or cows that are older are more susceptible to get this than livestock with their first or second progeny. Grass tetany has occurred on orchard grass, perennial ryegrass, timothy, tall fescue, crested wheatgrass, bromegrass, Kentucky bluegrass, annual ryegrass and small grain (wheat, oats, barley, triticale and rye) pastures. It also can occur when animals are fed hay during the winter months that contains low magnesium (good reason to get your hay tested). One of the greatest potentials for grass tetany is when the soil is low in available magnesium and high in potassium and nitrogen. Putting out to much manure or fertilizer can create this mineral imbalance (good reason to do a soil test).

Probably the worst thing about grass tetany is the symptoms. In most cases the first sign you will see is a dead animal. If you do notice symptoms, it will probably be a mild case. You might notice that the cow is nervous, she will stop grazing and be uncomfortable, showing unusually signs of alertness, such as staring and keeping their head and ears erect, staggering, or their skin will twitch constantly. If you notice any signs that could be related to grass tetany, you need to call the vet immediately.

Like anything else, the best way to avoid this problem is by prevention. The best way thing to do is to feed minerals, but not just any minerals, look for a loose free choice mineral that contains at least 8-12 percent magnesium. Most of the minerals like this will be labeled on the bag High Mag or High Magnesium. It should be obvious, but if you have any doubt just look at the label.

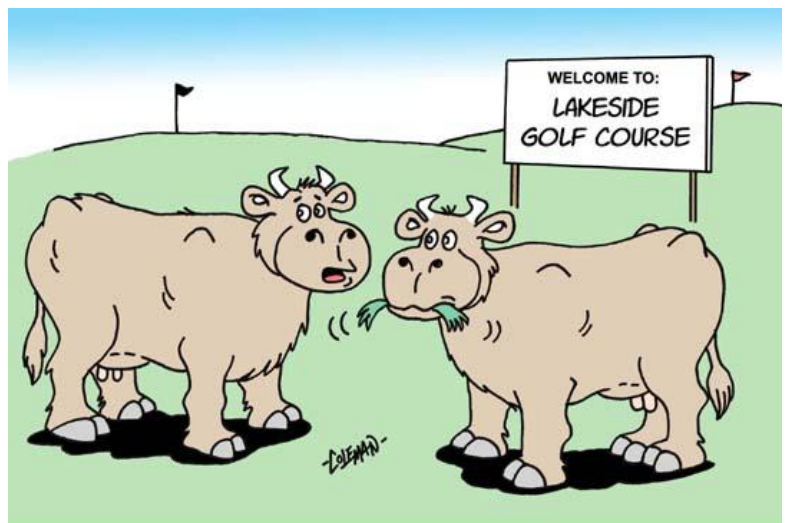
Alternative methods of prevention would be to use a Magnesium supplement. This can be added to a protein supplement, grain mix or a liquid supplement. Also research has also shown that the risk of grass tetany decreases on pastures that contain over 30% legumes or fed hay that is mixed with some legumes.

Minerals are a higher cost, but getting those minerals in your livestock will greatly improve their performance. Animals eat minerals when they need them, so if they eat the first bag in a day or so don't worry. Just keep it free choice and when they get the nutrients they need they will slow down and eat as needed.

The take home message that I want you to understand is to utilize what sources are available to you, not only to help increase your production but to also better your herd health. Trying to save a few dollars here and there will not help pay for a dead animal because of a management issue.



McDowell County Center
60 E. Court Street
Marion, North Carolina 28752



"WHATEVER YOU DO, DON'T TELL THE REST OF THE HERD
ABOUT THIS SECRET GRAZING PLACE WE FOUND."

Compiled and edited by:

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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.*