Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

Fall Beef Newsletter

In Cooperation with Western Wisconsin Beef Producers

Greetings -

We hope everyone has a safe fall harvest season and all your cattle are healthy.

We have assembled a number of articles on timely topics for this fall newsletter. You should find some helpful tips and information for fall and winter cattle management.

We are in the process of planning some in-person workshops for this coming winter, details will be coming once all the details are in place. These include the Driftless Region Beef Conference, UW Extension Cattle Feeders Workshops and UW Extension Cow-Calf Workshops.

If you have not done so, check out the new UW Extension Livestock webpage where our beef production information is now housed.

It can be found at this web address: https://livestock.extension.wisc.edu/

This newsletter is a cooperative effort with UW Madison Division of Extension in Buffalo, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau, and Vernon Counties and the Western Wisconsin Beef Producers Cooperative.

Don't Let Open Cows Eat Your Feed, and Profits, This Winter

Beef producers have several options for conducting early pregnancy diagnosis on their herd. High feed costs and limited forage inventories are reasons to consider using pregnancy diagnosis this year if it is not part of your current herd management. Several pregnancy diagnosis methods are available to beef producers. Don't let open cows eat your feed, and profits, this winter.

Remember the real value of pregnancy diagnosis is not finding pregnant cows, but open cows. Identifying open cows early presents an opportunity for herd managers to make decisions. Will open cows be marketed, or given another breeding opportunity? If marketed, when?

Pregnancy Diagnosis Methods

For many producers, rectal palpation conducted by a veterinarian has been and remains the gold standard. More options exist, though, with their own pros and cons. Four of the more common options are:

Direct detection (feeling or visualizing the fetus):

- Transrectal palpation: Accurate beginning 35 days after breeding. Experienced veterinarians can estimate the conception date (and thus expected calving date) if unknown and they can diagnose uterine and ovarian diseases, if present. The result is known immediately. Adding pregnancy palpations to your herd health program adds the opportunity to build your Veterinarian Client Patient Relationship (VCPR).
- Transrectal ultrasound: Accurate beginning 30 days after breeding. Experienced veterinarians can estimate the conception date (and thus expected calving date) if unknown and they can diagnose uterine and ovarian diseases, if present. Can diagnose cows carrying twins and fetal viability. Fetal sexing is possible 55 to 60 days after conception. The result is known immediately. This is also an opportunity to build your Veterinarian Client Patient Relationship.

Indirect detection (biological lab testing)

- Pregnancy Associated Glycoproteins (PAG's): Accurate beginning 25-30 days following breeding. Cows need to be 70-75 days post calving. Follow label directions specific to the test you select. Sample can be collected by blood or milk by the herd manager and submitted to a lab for analysis. Costs for testing supplies and shipping vary but may be a more cost-effective approach for some farms. Result is not known immediately as it is dependent on transport time and lab analysis.
- Progesterone tests: progesterone is the hormone responsible for maintaining pregnancy. Sampled through blood or milk, a low level detected indicates an open cow. A high progesterone level detected does not ensure pregnancy, since it is also elevated during most of the animal's reproductive cycle. Repeated testing raises reliability, but is not practical on most beef operations, which limits its usefulness to beef producers.

No matter the method you select, use recommended animal handling practices. Keep and use accurate records to get the most value out of your pregnancy diagnostics.

Not every cow diagnosed pregnant will calve. Some early embryonic death is natural. However, rough handling and stress created at the time of pregnancy diagnosis can have a negative impact on fetal viability and increase the rate of early embryonic death.

In years with plentiful feed and favorable cattle prices, waiting to market open cows after the fall rush can be a viable strategy, along with giving cows a second chance for a fall calving season. However, in years with limited feed inventories and high feed prices we encourage producers to calculate the amount of feed needed to carry open cows through the winter. If feed inventories are limited, marketing open cows is one of the first herd reduction strategies to implement. Please see our article Culling Consideration for the Beef Cow-Calf Herd on the Extension Livestock Topic Hub for more information on market cow strategies.

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Western Wisconsin Beef Producers Purple Tag Program

One way to help promote your calves is participating in the Purple Tag Program. The Western Wisconsin Beef Producers Purple Tag program is an example of a solid pre-conditioning program. Several folks participate in this already, and some of you may already be doing all or doing most of it and not realize it. Producers who use the Purple Tag protocol can use special ear tags at no cost, which can be put on the calves' ears when the last round of treatments is administered. Ear tags and a record keeping form for the program can be picked up at the Equity Cooperative Livestock Sale Barn at Sparta. The Purple Tag Program requirements are below.

A. Requirements:

1. Weaned a minimum of 30 days
2. Bunk broke and broke to water tank or fountain
3. Vaccinations given according to label and Beef Quality Assurance Guidelines (in front of shoulder)
   - A. IBR-BVD-PI3-BRSV -booster if label required; final dose must be MLV For IBR, BVD, PI3. -BRSV faction can be either MLV or killed.
   - B. 7 way clostridial -booster if label required, Subcutaneous product only
   - C. Mannheimia (pasteurella)
4. Dewormed with product that kills inhibited Ostertagia given at time of weaning and or within 90 days of sale.
5. Treated with product that kills lice and grubs (grub control subject to time of year requirements)
6. Dehorned– all horn tissue including scurs must be removed and or burnt
7. Castrated with any method (knife preferred) until 4 months of age. If over 4 months of age at time of castration, knife method Is required.
8. WWBP purple tag in ear
9. Seller pays $100/head to buyer if any heifers are found to be pregnant, and verified by a veterinarian within 45 days of sale.
10. Seller pays $100/head to buyer if any are bulls/stags and verified by a veterinarian within 45 days of sale
11. All procedures completed at least 30 days before sale and all surgical wounds healed. Final vaccinations must be administered at least 14 days before the sale.
12. If implanted, give product name and date administered
13. Read and follow all product label directions.

B. Optional Procedures

1. Additional Vaccines
   - A. Brucellosis (heifers only)
   - B. Haemophllus
   - C. Leptospirosis
   - D. Pinkeye
2. Coccidiostat
3. Heifers aborted
4. Third party verification of procedures

C. Animals that records indicate do not meet program requirements will be announced as not meeting program requirements prior to selling that lot; procedures done to them will be announced.

Communicating in Times of Stress

This article is part of the Extension Resilient Farms, Families, Businesses & Communities: Responding to Stress series. For more information visit: https://farms.extension.wisc.edu/farmstress/

How Stress Can Impact Effective Communication

It can be difficult to effectively communicate with others in times of stress. As you may have read in How Stress Affects Brain and Body, your ability to organize your thoughts and feelings into a clear message and to listen carefully is impacted by your body's physical reaction to stress. You may find yourself avoiding or withdrawing from conversations with your family, friends, and your ag service providers. However, openly discussing and airing problems, concerns, fears and frustrations can be constructive and healthy. This is especially true if we can move from the mode of being "cranky" to actively addressing the problem.

Importance of Good Communication

Families and farm couples who handle stress well communicate freely. Communication where people work together to solve problems or to plan for the future is an important way of regaining a positive sense of control. The process of admitting to worries and fears is sometimes difficult, but when all parties have open and clear access to information and can assist each other in finding solutions, problems become easier to solve. Talk with your family and friends about your stress and the changes that might need to happen at home. If you have children at home, you don't want to worry them with adult concerns about paying for groceries or the mortgage, but it's okay to let them know that there's less money coming into your home.

Principle for Communicating Effectively

Whether you are communicating with your family, your ag service providers or your farmer-clients, keep these in mind:

- Have patience as you talk with others.
  - Focus on the issue at hand
  - Avoid personal attacks
  - Show respect by truly listening to others' point of view
  - Recognize that others may be speaking with emotions behind the words, but you may also be listening with an emotional filter and not hear the true intent of their words.

- Help others tap into and fully use the social support systems they have around them. This could include Extension, technical college staff, churches, schools, trusted and experienced advisors. Involve people with appropriate expertise when considering issues of finance, production, and other technical specialties. Do not overlook the roles of health professionals including mental health.

- Keep your sense of humor. Laughter can change our perception of an adverse situation and relieves us from the cycles of stress. It's easier to laugh and regain perspective when we're around other people, which is a reason to continue to gather at places like coffee shops, restaurants, sporting events and churches during difficult times, even if at first you don't feel like being social.

- It's important to remember that children will sense the tension that you are feeling and may feel less secure. Keeping the lines of communication open during times like these can help everyone feel more connected. Family communication can also help older children and parents find ways to work together on managing the family finances.

Beef Producer Survey

The UW-Madison Division of Extension Livestock Program would love beef producer input to shape future beef programming. An anonymous survey was developed (link below) to gather this input. The survey is 13 questions long and has a mix of multiple choice and short-response questions so we can learn more about Wisconsin beef producers along with future industry challenges and opportunities. Survey link: https://uwmadison.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8hWjWNpvNuAZ3Yq

Costs of "Roughing the Cows Through the Winter"

When visiting farmers with beef cow-calf enterprises during times when feed prices are high, or hay is in short supply, a few will usually make a comment about roughing the cows through the winter. "Roughing the cows through" usually means that the cows must "make do" with the feed on hand or that which can be obtained cheaply. This feeding strategy often results in the cows losing weight through the winter and having less-than-ideal body condition score (BCS) of 5 to 6 at calving.

In the short-term, this appears to reduce costs and save money. However, if we look into the future, the impact of "roughing the cows through" the winter affects the bottom line much differently than the initial appearance of savings. Cattle with poor BCS produce poorer quality colostrum and less milk during lactation. Calves born to cows with less-than-ideal BCS are more likely to be weaker at birth, more susceptible to illness due to lower quality and quantity of colostrum and have lower weaning weights due to poor milk production. Therefore, the cost of roughing cows through their pregnancy not only affects the coming year's calf crop, but frequently linger into their future production cycles as described in the following paragraphs.

The goals for a cow calf operation should be a calving interval of 365 days for each cow, and a reasonably short calving season (30 to 45 days), resulting in a uniform calf crop. Uniform groups of feeder calves tend to attract more interest and higher prices from buyers. To achieve a 365-day calving interval, the cow's postpartum interval (time from calving to when she begins cycling) should be about 60 days for her to be rebred in 80 to 85 days. Research trials examining the effects of cows coming through the winter too thin at calving time, show how poor body condition can negatively influence calving interval. Most herds will likely have a wider range in body condition, due to age, herd social order, genetics etc., and as a result will have less calf crop uniformity.

Table 1 shows the influence of BCS at calving on postpartum interval and why 5 is the target BCS for mature cows at calving.

Table 1. Effect of Body Condition Score (BCS) at parturition on Postpartum Interval (PPI)

BCS	PPI, days
3	88.5
4	69.7
5	59.4
6	51.7
7	30.6

(Adapted from Houghton et al., 1990)

This can be taken a step further and the relationship between a cow's BCS at calving and total income can be compared (Table 2). As BCS decreased, pregnancy rate and weaning weight both declined. This can lead to a severe reduction in income.

Table 2. Relationship of body condition score (BCS) to beef cow performance and income.

BCS	Pregnancy rate, %	Calving interval, d	Calf ADG, lb.	Calf WW, lb.	Calf Price, $/100 lb.**	$/Cow Exposed*
3	43	414	1.60	374	150	241.23
4	61	381	1.75	460	140	392.84
5	86	364	1.85	514	135	596.75
6	93	364	1.85	514	135	645.33

(adapted from Kunkle et al., 1994) * Income per calf x pregnancy rate. ** late summer 2021 feeder prices

Roughing the cows through winter may look good up front but the examples shown above indicate that the long-term costs are real. When overwintering the cows, options to save money may include grouping the cows with similar nutritional needs and supplement accordingly for that group. An example of grouping is putting the 1st and 2nd calf cows into a separate group as they are still growing themselves in addition to producing a calf. In addition, test your forages so you know what you have and then purchase the additional feed you need, rather than guess and not spend your money as efficiently as possible. Depending on your forage quality, some cows will need little if any supplementation and others may need more.

References

Houghton, P.L., R.P. Lemenager, L.A. Horstman, K.S. Hendrix, and G.E. Moss. 1990. Effects of Body Composition, Pre- and Postpartum Energy Level and Early Weaning on Reproductive Performance of Beef Cows and Preweaning Calf Gain. J. Anim. Sci. 68:1438-1446.

Kunkle, W.E., R.S. Sands and D.O. Rae. 1994. Effect of body condition on productivity in beef cattle. M.

Fields and R. Sands (ed.) Factors Affecting Calf Crop. Pp. 167-178. CRC Press

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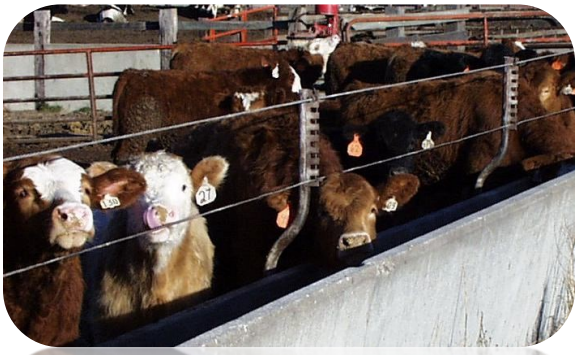
Bunk Management

When grain prices are high, there is usually an increase in inquiries from cattle feeders looking for ways to cut production costs. The ration is typically the first place many feeders look for change. Assessing current bunk management practices for adherence to protocol, or implementing changes to improve feed efficiency and reduce waste is another area for consideration.

Some producers may have opportunities to implement low-cost management changes to their bunk management and improve returns. Two common bunk management approaches are ad libitum (free choice), where the cattle always have feed in the bunk and programmed intake management (often called slick bunk management). Slick Bunk Management is where the bunks are "read" before preparing and delivering the current feeding to determinant the amount of feed consumed since the last feeding. Bunks should be "slicked up," meaning only a small amount of feed remains. The goal is to deliver the amount of feed that closely matches the animal's intake for each feeding period. This management practice is a balance between maximum and consistent intake and minimizing waste. The publication "Feed Bunk Management" https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/Feed-Bunk-Management provides a thorough description of reading and managing feed bunks when feeding cattle.



The only additional equipment needed between the two feeding approaches when using a TMR to feed in a bunk is a notebook and pencil to record bunk scores for determining adjustments in feed delivered for the slick bunk program. Several feeding trials comparing free-choice feeding to slick bunk management have shown: little difference in the rate of gain and carcass traits; an improvement in feed-to-gain efficiency from the slick bunk feeding program; and free choice bunk management had greater variability in daily intakes. Increased intake variability can lead to digestive problems such as acidosis, reducing further performance. Table 1 contains the results of one trial with yearling beef steers to show how gain and intakes differ between free choice and slick bunk feeding management.

Table 1. Effect of feed bunk management method on feedlot performance (Bierman and Pritchard)

	Free choice	Slick Bunk Management
Initial wt., lbs.	865	864
Final wt., lbs.	1331	1328
Average daily gain, lbs.	3.85	3.84
Dry matter intake lbs./hd/day	26.39	23.57
Feed to gain lbs.	6.9	6.15

Using a feed price of $232/ton dry matter basis (calculated from late summer projected fall 2021 feed prices), costs would be $80.04/ cwt of gain for ad libitum bunk management compared to $71.34/ cwt of gain for slick bunk management. The real difference per head would be $41.96 per head over the 121 days of this feed trial and approximately 465 pounds of gain. We would expect to see a similar intake differential response in Holstein steers. For example, feeding Holstein steers from 400 pounds to 1400 pounds could improve feed costs between $80 to $90 per head using $232/ dry matter ton feed cost.

In addition, the cattle fed free choice tend to have a greater range in daily gain than the cattle in the slick bunk-managed groups. The greater range in daily gains can result in greater difficulty in putting consistent quality loads of market-ready cattle together, leading to increased price discounts at sale time or more trips to the sale barn with less head per load.

To optimize cattle growth and feed efficiency, the goal should be to deliver the same feed, with the same quality, in a quantity that closely matches their intake at the same time every day. Also, beware that weather changes will impact day-to-day feed intake. Top managers learn to anticipate these changes and manage accordingly. These practices will help minimize the risk of inconsistent intakes or going off feed, resulting in reductions in gain and performance and more days on feed.

References

Bierman, S. J. and Pritchard, R. H., "Effect of Feed Delivery Management on Yearling Steer Performance" (1996). South Dakota Beef Report, 1996. Paper 6. http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/sd_beefreport_1996/6

Lundy, E.L., Loy, D., Dahlke, G., “Feed Bunk Management” IBCR 201A (2015), https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/Feed-Bunk-Management

Reviewed by: Amanda Cauffman, Carolyn Ihde, and Ryan Sterry, UW Madison Division of Extension Educators in Grant, Crawford/ Richland, and Agent in St. Croix Counties respectively.

Look at all costs, not just daily feed cost, when evaluating feedlot rations

When corn prices are high, it is common to hear some cattle feeders make the statement that they will have to cut back on the amount of corn and put more roughage in the ration to save money. There is a good chance that this practice may only be providing a false sense of saving money. It is certainly a good idea to look at different feedstuffs for use in rations. When doing so, it is equally important to look at how the animals will perform on different rations to get an accurate picture of all of the potential costs, and ultimately net returns, associated with a different ration.

When reducing the amount of grain or concentrate in feeds and increasing roughage, the energy level of the feed is usually reduced. This strategy leads to lower rates of gain, increased pounds of feed to produce a pound of gain, and more days on feed. The following examples compare two rations, using the same feedstuffs but at different levels to feed Holstein steers from 400 to 1450 pounds and beef steers from 500 to 1400 pounds. The example rations were formulated using the BRaNDS ration software from Iowa State University, which uses the latest NRC Nutrition Requirements to predict animal performance, and the UW Extension Feedlot Enterprise Budget spreadsheet was used to calculate costs used in the examples.

Prices:

Rolled Corn - $5.00/ bu
Low quality hay- $100/ton
DDGS - $230/ ton
Mineral pack - $500/ t
Yardage - $0.75/ head per day

Example Rations (dry matter basis):

High Roughage (30% roughage)

0.54 NEg Mcal/lb d.m.
47% rolled corn
30% low quality hay
20% dried distillers grains with solubles
3% mineral pack

High Energy (10% roughage)

0.62 NEg Mcal/lb d.m.
67% rolled corn
10% low quality hay
20% dried distillers grains with solubles
3% mineral pack

Table 1. Beef Steer performance comparison on two energy/ roughage level rations

Program	High Energy	High Roughage
Start Weight	500	500
End Weight	1400	1400
Rate of Gain lb/day	3.5	2.8
Feed to Gain lb dm:lb live wt	6.2:1	7.6:1
Days on Feed	257	321
Feed Cost $/day	$2.35	$2.11
Feed Cost $/lb gain	$0.67	$0.75
Total Feed Cost	$705	$789
Additional days on feed		64
Additional Yardage		$48
Additional cost of production from feed and yardage		$132

Table 2. Holstein Steer performance comparison on two energy/ roughage level rations

Program	High Energy	High Roughage
Start Weight	400	400
End Weight	1450	1450
Rate of Gain lb/day	3.0	2.3
Feed to Gain lb dm:lb live wt	7.1:1	9.2:1
Days on Feed	350	457
Feed Cost $/day	$2.31	$2.16
Feed Cost $/lb gain	$0.77	$0.91
Total Feed Cost	$831	$911
Additional days on feed		107
Additional Yardage		$80
Additional cost of production from feed and yardage		$160

The examples above both show that the cost of feed per head per day is higher for the higher energy, lower roughage ration. However, it is more important to look at the feed cost per pound of gain and the number of days on feed to help evaluate all costs associated with the ration change. Because the animals are gaining faster and more efficiently on the higher energy ration, their total feed cost and yardage costs are less than on the lower energy, higher roughage ration.

Even in the example of beef steers, where the differences are not as great on a daily basis, it does not take much for the total difference in cost to become substantial. Remember, every additional day on feed has costs beyond feed that are often forgotten about or overlooked. There is the equipment used to feed, bed, and clean pens plus labor, fuel, and utilities, to name a few.

Higher forage rations can have a place in cattle feeding operations. Forages may be best utilized earlier in the feeding program as a grower type ration when cattle are more feed efficient and may fit well with some farms' resources that grow forages as part of their conservation plans. Still, cattle should be transitioned onto finishing rations before they get too big to produce a desirable finished animal. Sometimes it may also be more profitable to sell the animals before transitioning them onto finishing rations rather than owning them through the finishing period.

It is time well spent to evaluate different rations and scenarios as prices and situations change to optimize profits using the resources the farm has available. When doing so, it is critical to look at all costs impacted by any ration changes, not just ration cost per ton or feed cost per day, to assess costs and returns accurately.

References:

Beef Ration and Nutrition Decisions Software (BRaNDS), Iowa Beef Center, Iowa State University.

UW Extension Feedlot Enterprise Budget, Hendrickson, Lehmkuhler, Radunz, Halfman 2001, 2008, revised 2017, 2020

Reviewed by: *Carolyn Ihde, Amanda Cauffman, and Ryan Sterry, UW Extension Agriculture Educators in Richland/ Crawford, Grant Counties, and UW Extension Agriculture Agent in St. Croix County respectively.*

Cattle Market Situation and Outlook

Brenda Boetel, Professor and Extension Commodity Marketing Specialist, University of Wisconsin-River Falls

This past year saw the beef cattle industry begin to bounce back from the COVID pandemic and the subsequent implications on supply and demand. Although the cattle market continues to deal with burdensome levels of market-ready finished cattle, strong consumer demand has kept a floor on fat cattle prices. Decreasing feeder cattle numbers, coupled with strong consumer demand for beef, has kept feeder cattle prices relatively high given the high feed costs and lower than expected pen space availability. As the industry prepares for 2022, concerns regarding high feed prices and the impacts on feeder cattle and fed cattle prices remain relevant.

Drought

The northern plains and western third of the United States saw increasing drought conditions through August. Although September has seen some relief for areas of Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa, the USDA reported topsoil moisture was at least one-third very short in all midwestern states except Wisconsin, which had only 11% rated as very short. Lingering impacts from summer drought has left 63% of Minnesota's pastures in very poor to poor condition as of September 12. Wisconsin's pasture condition was rated at 60% good to excellent.

The seven states with 50% of the nation's beef cows that calved in 2020 have varying percentages of pasture conditions rated as poor or very poor. For example, Missouri and Oklahoma have only 9% and 19%, respectively, of pastures rated poor or very poor, while Montana and South Dakota have 88% and 81% of pastures rated poor or very poor.

Herd size and cycles

Cattle cycle length is measured by comparing peak (or trough) cattle inventory to peak (or trough) cattle inventory. Cycles can last from 4 to 18 years, with the average at just over 12 years. Each cycle has different phases: a liquidation phase, where cattle numbers decrease, and an expansion phase, where cattle numbers increase. The most recent cattle cycle began expansion in 2015, following 7 years of contraction. The industry began contraction in 2019 with modest liquidation; however, the 2021 drought has accelerated liquidation. Areas hit hardest by the drought are seeing greater liquidation. How large this liquidation will be isn't currently clear and won't be known for certain until 2022. Nonetheless, the sale of lower weight feeder cattle, and percentage of heifers sold helps indicate the extent of liquidation.

For the August to September 17 time period, the percentage of feeder cattle sold weighing less than 600 pounds increased to 60% compared to 59% for the same period in 2020. The relative increase in marketings of animals weighing less than 600 pounds indicates early weaning, which is a common practice in drought years. Additionally, the larger volumes of lighter animals being marketed are in northern and western regions of the country, where the drought has hit hardest and forage is limited.

The percentage of heifers in USDA's feeder cattle sale reports, sold through auctions, direct sales, and video sales, from August through September 17 is higher this year than 2020. Heifers sold through all venues during this time period were 40% of receipts versus 38% in August 2020. Video and internet sales saw significant increases in heifer sale percentage for this time period, increasing form 35% in 2020 to 38% in 2021. This seven week time period saw the percent of heifers sold that was greater than those seen in the previous drought year of 2012 and similar to those seen in 2010 and 2011. The increase in heifers being sold into the meat supply chain as opposed to being used as replacements is especially seen in the north and west. The increase in heifers being sold is an indication that pastures are exhausted, and hay prices are too burdensome to maintain the herd size.

Regional hay prices also communicate a part of the drought story. California and Oregon hay prices are over $220 per ton, with some trading close to $300 per ton. Prices decline when moving further east and south, with areas in the Southeast seeing hay below $100 per ton. South Dakota saw prices of $160 per ton for grass hay, while Wisconsin is seeing prices between $91 and $131 per ton for Grade 2 and 3 hay.

Although the cattle industry is currently in the liquidation phase of the cycle, and the typical cyclical price pattern would be to expect increasing feeder cattle prices over the next few years, the heightened liquidation will increase the short-term supply of feeder cattle effectively creating a short-term ceiling for prices. On the other hand, the smaller calf crop that has occurred since 2019 will create a price floor for feeder cattle. Where will prices gravitate? As of September 12, calf prices have not seen significant price pressure as Iowa 500-to-600-pound calves sold for around $180 through most of August and into September. Lighter calves weighing 400-to-500 pounds were still higher in August and early September than they were in June and averaging above $190 per cwt. in Iowa. Current prices suggest feeder cattle prices will stay toward the top of the price range.

Cattle slides

Calf movement will continue to increase over the next few weeks as the fall run picks up pace. As the calf run increases, the question to consider is what weight calves cattle feeders should buy. Relative weights are the largest driving factor for the relationship between light and heavy feeder cattle prices. The normal relationship between different feeder calf prices is for prices per hundredweight to decline as cattle weights increase. Understanding this relationship helps to answer what weight calves should be purchased at. This price slide reflects what it costs to add weight to the animal and is a big indicator for gross margin, or value of gain. For example, for the week ending September 17, Iowa feeder prices indicated that the value of 300 pounds of gain for a 500-pound steer was $1.17/lb. when sold at 800 pounds. An additional 100 pound gain to a 900-pound ending weight had an average value of gain of $1.00/lb. for the entire 400 pounds of gain. These prices indicate the value of gain is stronger for gains at the lighter end of feeder weights. A 600-pound beginning weight has a value of gain of $0.86/lb. for 300 pounds of gain up to 900 pounds, whereas a 450-pound beginning weight has a value of gain of $1.18/lb. for 300 pounds of gain up to 750 pounds. These values demonstrate that stocker and backgrounder producers currently desire lighter weight animals that provide greater flexibility for adding weight.

Things to watch in 2022

Feeder cattle prices for all weight categories are higher this fall than last. The higher year over year prices are occurring even in states hit hardest by the drought. The lower availability of cattle outside of feedyards, coupled with continued strong demand is keeping those prices high. The question is what will prices look like for heavier feeder cattle in early 2022? Availability of feeder cattle is not going to increase, and in some regions it may decline faster than expected due to the early fall run. The unknown is whether feedyard placements will continue at the previously expected pace.

Labor challenges in the packing industry, as well as other setbacks, have forced lower slaughter numbers. According to CattleFax, there were enough cattle to meet a 523,000 head/week slaughter pace from May through September. Instead, the processing segment averaged only 517,000 head/week in those months, which kept an additional 150,000 head of fed cattle on the front-end, thereby keeping feedyards fuller than expected. If cattle feeders slow placement rates due to higher numbers of cattle remaining on feed than expected, there will be some additional short-term pressure on feeder cattle prices, but this should be limited.

May to July 2021 saw smaller feedlot placements compared to 2020, however year over year comparisons are hard given the implications from COVID in 2020. Forage availability is the biggest challenge for western stocker cattle. Many of these operations will likely not have adequate forage this winter. As a result, the heavyweight feeder cattle supply for spring may be tighter than anticipated as lightweight animals will likely be placed directly on feed this

winter. If heavyweight feeder cattle prices remain stable and if the producer has adequate forage available, there is some potential for profit from stocker cattle this winter. Producers need to analyze their own costs and revenue potential. Wisconsin Extension has some decision tools available at https://livestock.extension.wisc.edu/ that may aid in the decision process.

Projections at this time suggest that feeder cattle prices will stay higher than last year's levels, with 500-600 pound animals showing a 9% increase year over year in prices, and 700-800 pound animals having a 10% increase in year over year prices. For the first half of 2022, heavy weight feeder cattle will continue to see 10% higher prices than 2021, while lighter weight animals will show a more subdued year over year increase of only 3.5%.

Upcoming Beef Quality Assurance Certification Meetings Scheduled for the Area

The UW-Madison's Division of Extension and the Wisconsin Beef Council will be hosting a number of in-person Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) certification workshops in the upcoming months. In-person sessions are intended for those who cannot complete the online certification available by going to https://www.bqa.org/ and clicking on 'Certification'. Farmers are encouraged not to wait until the last minute to earn BQA certification or to recertify, as it is better that a current certification overlaps rather than expires.

Who needs BQA certification? For a farmer/rancher to fully understand their individual BQA requirement, it is recommended that they visit with their cattle buyers. Auction barns and packing plants in Wisconsin have provided the guidance below:

Finished/fat cattle: Tyson buyers require farmers to be BQA certified; auction markets are required to have proof of BQA certification and will announce farmer status prior to auctioning cattle. JBS requires that producers selling cattle directly to their plants sign an affidavit stating that they are "in compliance with all applicable state or national BQA certification and verification programs."
Feeder calves: At this time, there is no BQA requirement for the sale of feeder cattle.
Cull cows/bulls: JBS requires that producers selling cattle directly to their plants sign an affidavit stating that they are "in compliance with all applicable state or national BQA certification and verification programs."

Dairy calves: At this time, there is no BQA requirement for the sale of dairy calves. However, the U.S. calf-raising sector now has a voluntary program to help ensure optimal calf health and welfare via the Calf Care & Quality Assurance (CCQA) program. Details can be found at https://www.calfcareqa.org/.

The national dairy FARM program can help dairy producers manage their operations in ways that will ensure quality milk as well as produce beef that will meet consumer expectations. All dairy producers that complete a FARM 3.0 evaluation are BQA equivalent covered.

Upcoming in-person meetings in the area are: *(all meetings unless noted otherwise will have registration at 5:30pm and start at approximately 5:45 pm)*

Nov 9 - Gays Mills
Nov. 16 - Viroqua
Dec. 6 - Prairie du Chein
Dec. 7 - Baraboo
Dec. 7 - La Crosse
Dec. 9 - Alma (starts at 9:30 am)
Jan. 11 - Baraboo
Jan. 11 - Viroqua
Jan. 11 - La Crosse

To register and for a complete list of in-person locations go to at https://tinyurl.com/2hr5karf. Any questions related to BQA certification contact the Wisconsin Beef Council at 1-800-728-2333 or the Monroe County Extension Office at 608-269-8722. To attend in-person meetings, farmers must register 7 days before the meeting date as attendance is limited based on location capacity and to follow any COVID guidelines in place at that time. NO walk-ins will be allowed. Due to limited capacity, it is encouraged that one individual per farm attend the in-person meetings. The individual attending the meeting will hold the BQA certification; family members and employees are covered by that certification when it is filed with the market(s). It is each individuals' responsibility to share certification details with markets.