

Virginia Cooperative Extension

A partnership of Virginia Tech and Virginia State University



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Livestock Update

Beef - Horse - Poultry - Sheep - Swine

March 2011

This LIVESTOCK UPDATE contains timely subject matter on beef cattle, horses, poultry, sheep, swine, and related junior work. Use this material as you see fit for local newspapers, radio programs, newsletters, and for the formulation of recommendations.

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Dates to Remember

BEEF

MARCH

- 20 VA BCIA SW Bull Test Open House. Dublin. **Contact:** Scott Greiner, (540) 231-9163, email: sgreiner@vt.edu
- 26 VA BCIA SW Bull Test & Bred Heifer Sale. Wytheville. **Contact:** Scott Greiner, (540) 231-9163, email: sgreiner@vt.edu

APRIL

- 15-17 VA Beef Expo. Rockingham County Fairgrounds. Harrisonburg. **Contact:** Bill McKinnon, (540) 992-1009, email: bmckinnon@vacattlemen.org

GENERAL

MARCH

- 25-26 Block and Bridle Stockman's, Meats and Livestock Judging Contests.
Contact: Mark Wahlberg, (540) 231-9161, email: wahlberg@vt.edu

APRIL

- 8-10 State 4-H/FFA Horse Judging & 4-H Hippology, Horse Bowl and Presentations. Virginia Horse Center. Lexington. **Contacts:** Celeste Crisman, (540) 231-9162, email: ccrisman@vt.edu or Joi Saville, (540) 231-2257, email: joi.saville@vt.edu

March Beef Management Calendar

Dr. Scott P. Greiner

Extension Animal Scientist, VA Tech

Spring Calving Herds

- Move pregnant heifers and early calving cows to calving area about 2 weeks before due date
- Continue calving
- Check cows 3 to 4 times per day, heifers more often – assist early if needed
- Keep calving area clean and well drained, move healthy pairs out to large pastures 3 days after calving
- Ear tag and dehorn all calves at birth; castrate male calves in commercial herds
- Give selenium and vitamin A & D injections to newborn calves
- Feed cows extra energy after calving; some protein may be needed also
- Keep high quality, high magnesium, high selenium minerals available
- Purchase estrous synchronization supplies; line up AI technician or AI supplies
- Order fertilizer; start getting equipment ready

Fall Calving Herds

- Pull bulls to maintain a 60-75 day calving season
- Remove bulls to bull pasture and check condition
- Begin creep feeding or creep grazing calves if desired
- Plan marketing strategy for calves
- Begin feeding high magnesium minerals to prevent grass tetany
- Make first selection of replacement heifers
- Order fertilizer; start getting equipment ready

Yearling Bull Management

Dr. Scott P. Greiner

Extension Animal Scientist, VA Tech

Spring bull buying season has arrived. Beef producers spend a great deal of time studying performance information, EPDs, pedigrees and other pertinent information to acquire the next herd bull. Of equal importance is the care and management of the newly acquired bull. In most cases, this bull is a yearling bull and proper management and nutrition are essential for the bull to perform satisfactorily during the breeding season as well as in subsequent breeding seasons.

Management Prior to the Breeding Season

Many newly purchased yearling bulls have recently completed a performance test, which provided a high plane of nutrition to properly evaluate the potential growth of the bull. Upon completion of this test, the energy level of the diet should gradually be reduced to prevent excessive fat deposition. The reduction in energy may be accomplished through restricting intake of high energy grain supplements, in conjunction with supplying a total diet lower in energy content (primarily forage). Young bulls should be managed to be a body condition score 6 at turn-out. This will give the bull adequate reserves of energy for use during the breeding season. Yearling bulls can be expected to lose 100 pounds or more during the course of the breeding season.

Acquiring a new yearling bull at least 60 to 90 days prior to the breeding season is critical from several aspects. First, this leaves ample time for the new bull to get adjusted to the feed and environment of his new home, as well as an opportunity for several new bulls to be comingled for a period of time prior to turnout. Secondly, adequate exercise, in combination with a proper nutritional program, is essential to “harden” these bulls up prior to the breeding season. A facility for the newly acquired bull that allows for ample exercise will help create bulls that are physically fit for the breeding season. The nutrition of the bull will be dependent on body condition. Yearling bulls are still growing and developing and should be targeted to gain 2.0 to 2.5 pounds per day from a year of age through the breeding season. Bulls weighing approximately 1200 pounds will consume 25 to 30 pounds of dry matter per day. This intake may consist of high quality pasture plus 12 lbs corn, grass legume hay plus 12 lbs corn, or 80 lbs corn silage plus 2 lbs protein supplement. Provide adequate clean water and a complete mineral free-choice.

Prior to the breeding season, all bulls should receive breeding soundness exams (BSE) to assure fertility. All bulls that are to be used should have a BSE annually. Because a variety of factors may affect bull fertility, it may be advisable to re-test young bulls before the breeding season even if it has only been a few months since their pre-sale BSE.

Management During the Breeding Season

The breeding season should be kept to a maximum of 60 days for young bulls. This will prevent over-use of the bull, severe weight loss and reduced libido. Severe weight loss may impair future growth and development of the young bull and reduce his lifetime usefulness. When practical, supplementing young bulls with grain during the breeding season will reduce excessive weight loss.

In single-sire situations, young bulls can normally be expected to breed a number of females approximately equal to their age in months. Using this rule of thumb, a newly purchased bull that is 18 months of age could be placed with 18 cows or heifers. Bulls used together in multiple-sire breeding

pastures should be of similar age and size. Young bulls cannot compete with older bulls in the same breeding pasture. A common practice is to rotate bulls among different breeding pastures every 21 to 28 days. This practice decreases the breeding pressure on a single bull. Some producers use older bulls early in the breeding season, and then replace them with young bulls. The appropriate bull to female ratio will vary from one operation to the next based on bull age, condition, fertility, and libido, as well as size of the breeding pasture, available forage supply, and length of the breeding season.

All bulls should be observed closely to monitor their breeding behavior and libido to ensure they are servicing and settling cows. Additionally, observe the cowherd to monitor their estrous cycles. Many females coming back into heat may be the result of a subfertile or infertile bull. All bulls should be monitored for injury or lameness that may compromise their breeding capability.

Management After the Breeding Season

Young bulls require a relatively high plane of nutrition following the breeding season to replenish body condition and meet demands for continued growth. Yearling bulls should be maintained in a separate lot from mature bulls, so these additional nutritional requirements can be provided. Body condition and projected mature size of the bull will determine his nutrient requirements during the 9 months following the breeding season. Bulls should be kept away from cows in an isolated facility or pasture after the breeding season. In the winter months, provide cover from extreme weather that may cause frostbite to the scrotum resulting in decreased fertility.

All herd bulls should receive breeding soundness exams (BSE) to assure fertility on an annual basis. Assess the bull battery well in advance of the breeding season so that new herd sires can be acquired in a timely fashion.

Grass Tetany Season Is Around the Corner

Dr. Mark A. McCann

Extension Animal Scientist, VA Tech

Early spring is usually the peak period for the occurrence of grass tetany in lactating beef cows in Virginia. Grass tetany is caused by low blood levels of magnesium and is worsened by high levels of nitrogen and potassium and low levels of calcium and magnesium intake. The lush new growth of cool season perennials and annuals consumed by spring calving cows is a recipe for trouble. Heavy nitrogen and potassium fertilization intensify the problem. This makes it more of an issue in the poultry production areas where litter is used routinely as a pasture fertilizer. Similar risks can be observed on pastures fertilized with other animal manures or bio-solids.

Grass tetany can be prevented by supplementing lactating cows with .5-1.0 ounces of supplemental magnesium per day during the high risk period. Magnesium is not effectively stored in the body, as such; supplementation is only cost effective during the high risk periods. There are several commercial high magnesium mineral options available from feed and farm suppliers across the state. Commonly called High-Mag blocks or mixes, these should contain about 14% magnesium with a targeted intake of 4 ounces per head per day. For small herds, it is usually more practical and easier to purchase these supplements than to mix individual ingredients.

Cattlemen also have the option of mixing their own magnesium-based mineral mix on the farm.

- 25% trace mineralized salt
- 25% dicalcium phosphate
- 25% magnesium oxide
- 25% corn or dried molasses

A mature cow needs to consume 4-5 ounces of the mineral mix daily. With this level of intake, a cow will receive 1-1.2 ounce of magnesium oxide daily. Magnesium oxide is about 60% magnesium so cows will receive .6-.7 ounces of magnesium daily from this mineral mix. In most situations this should control grass tetany. When using this mix or any High-Mag mineral mix, be sure to remove all other sources of salt from the cattle's diet.

Monitoring consumption of any magnesium supplement is important to insure that cattle are consuming the supplement at a level to provide protection. Magnesium oxide is an unpalatable mineral and the salt and corn/molasses are added in an effort to improve palatability and consumption. Monitoring intake will allow modification in the recipe. It is a mistake to believe that lower than expected consumption is due to a lack of need on the cow's part. More likely it is an indication of the palatability of the mineral mix.

Other than palatability, low mineral consumption can be caused by poor mineral feeder placement or an inadequate number of feeders for the number of cows. Locate the feeders in the high traffic or loafing areas and provide one feeder for every 20 cows. This will enable cows at the bottom of the herd pecking order to consume enough minerals.

High-Mag minerals are only necessary and effective during high risk situations. There is no advantage in using them during the other times of the year. However, it is important to start supplementation ahead of your critical period to allow cows an opportunity to adapt to the mix and to insure necessary intake levels are achieved.

Beef Webinar Focuses on Profitable Forage Management

March 15th, 6:30pm

Dr. Mark A. McCann

Extension Animal Scientist, VA Tech



Dr. Ben Tracy, Associate Professor, Dept. of Crop, Soil and Environmental Sciences at Virginia Tech, will be the featured speaker for the Beef Webinar sponsored by Virginia Cooperative Extension and scheduled for 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 15th.

Dr. Tracy focuses his research program in Grassland Ecosystem Management and is a cooperator in the Pasture Finished Beef Initiative at the Shenandoah Valley Research and Extension Center.

Dr. Tracy will be providing a discussion of "**Profitable Forage Management**" with a focus on how producer's management decisions and practices can affect the success of their forage production for

2011. Participants in the on-line meeting will have the opportunity to ask questions through an on-line chat box or over the telephone using a number provided during the program. Check with your Extension Agent about accessing the program at your local office. Producers with high speed internet service can access the meeting at home. The web address to join the meeting is <http://connect.extension.iastate.edu/beefcattlewebinar/>. Alternatively, webinar information and meeting links are also available on the VT Beef Extension webpage <http://www.vtbeef.apsc.vt.edu/>. From the VT Beef Extension site, you can click on the meeting link and go directly to the meeting.

Recording of the January and February Beef Webinars can also be accessed through the VT Beef Extension page. If you have questions please contact Mark McCann at 540-231-9153.

Bill McDonald and McDonald Farms Named Virginia BCIA 2011 Outstanding Seedstock Producer of the Year

Joi Saville

Extension Beef Associate, VA Tech

Virginia BCIA is proud to present the 2011 Virginia Outstanding Seedstock Producer Award to McDonald Farms, owned and operated by the McDonald family- Martha, Bill, along with his wife, Teresa, and son, Joseph, and Jim McDonald, Jr. of Blacksburg, Virginia. After graduating from Virginia Tech in Animal Science, Bill joined the family operation and has been a driving force in developing the genetics and marketing programs of the operation and currently serves as the manager.

In operation since 1763, McDonald Farms has been transformed from a commercial operation to an all seedstock herd of 150 cows. Initially introducing Simmental genetics, the herd now maintains both registered Simmental and Angus cattle.

McDonald Farms was instrumental in the development of the Southwest Virginia BCIA Bull Testing Program. Until recent years, Bill has sent many high quality Simmental bulls through the BCIA program. In the last few years, the farm has conducted its own “Pick of the Pen” bull sale held in April, where they offer Simmental, Angus, and Hybrid bulls for sale. In addition to the bulls, McDonald Farms also market commercial bred heifers.

The McDonalds have always been supportive of Extension and youth livestock programs and have hosted local and state educational programs, field days, and livestock judging team workouts at the farm.

Bill has served as a leader in the local and state cattle industry. He has been president of the Virginia Beef Cattle Improvement Association and the Virginia Cattlemen’s Association. He has also served on the boards of the Dublin Feeder Cattle Association, Virginia Beef Expo and the Virginia Cattlemen’s Foundation. Bill was instrumental in the recent development of New River Valley Cattle Producers Association and was that group’s first president.

Nationally, Bill has served on the board of the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, policy division and is currently a board member and serves as the vice-chairman for the American Simmental Association.

**R. L. Blanton Named Virginia BCIA
2011 Outstanding Commercial Producer of the Year**

Joi D. Saville
Extension Beef Associate, VA Tech

Virginia BCIA is proud to present the 2011 Virginia Outstanding Commercial Producer Award to Reuben L. Blanton, Jr. from Amelia, Virginia.

R. L. Blanton and Son is a fourth generation farm in Amelia County with 1500 acres that includes over 600 acres of improved pasture in a well managed rotational grazing system, 500 acres of crops in corn, soybeans and small grains, 100 acres of small grain hay, as well a managed timber stand with a combination of hardwoods and planted loblolly pines.

Mr. Blanton's beef cattle operation consists of over 200 cows with Angus, Gelbvieh, and Simmental pedigrees which fall-calve during a 80-day season beginning in September. Calves are finished in a counter-slope facility utilizing farm raised feeds and sold on a carcass grid from February to May. Blanton develops of 25 – 30 replacement heifers annually and has purchased an additional 10 Virginia Premium Assured Plus AI Bred Heifers in recent years. Bulls are acquired out of the top end of both the Southwest Virginia and Culpeper BCIA Bull Test Programs, as well as other performance tested bulls of Angus, Gelbvieh and Balancer genetics. Blanton has managed to produce farm to rail cattle that grade 80% USDA Choice or better with a high percentage yield grade 2 and 800 pound carcass weights.

Mr. Blanton is an outstanding manager of his resources and is highly innovative in all areas of his farm production. He is also a tremendous supporter of Extension Programs by serving as a host of numerous field days, on-farm research, demonstrations and workshops, and 4-H judging programs. Blanton has collaborated with Dr. Scott Hagood, Extension Specialist at Virginia Tech, and numerous graduate students over the last 30 years evaluating strategies for weed control in corn, soybeans, and small grains. Blanton was a multiple winner of the Virginia High Yield Wheat Production and 100 Bushel per Acre Club Member and a State Forage Producer Award winner.

In addition to his farming operation, Mr. Blanton has provided leadership in his area by serving for many years on the County Farm Bureau Board, County Planning Commission, and County School Board Construction Committee. He has been recognized numerous times for his efforts in implementing conservation practices including several conservation farm awards.

**Mullins Angus Farm Named Virginia BCIA
2011 Premier Angus Breeder and Bartenslager Award Winner**

Joi D. Saville
Extension Beef Associate, VA Tech

BCIA is proud to recognize Mr. Freddie Mullins of Mullins Angus Farm with the 2011 Bartenslager Award and Premier Angus Breeder Award. Mullins Angus is located in far southwest Virginia outside the town of Clintwood. The majority of their pasture is made up of reclaimed surface mine land.

The Mullins' have been in the cattle business for over 40 years, with the last 15 years spent in the Angus seedstock business. Their registered herd was started with the purchase of 5 heifers and has grown to approximately 50 females.

With the applied philosophy "If our last calf crop is not our best one, we haven't done our job right!"; Freddie takes great pride in his cow herd, and through the use of high accuracy AI sires strives to make each calf crop better than the last.

Mullins Angus Farm's consignment to the 2009-10 BCIA Bull Tests at Culpeper and Southwest Virginia exemplify the quality and consistency of their herd. A long-time participant in the BCIA program, Mullins Angus bulls are consistently strong performers and in demand from commercial bull buyers.

The 7 Mullins bulls evaluated in 2009-10 had an average Station Index of 109, which included an average YW ratio of 110 and average ADG ratio of 107. In this group, Mullins Angus had two of the top six indexing bulls at the Culpeper Senior Bull Test. These bulls were sired by Objective 3J15, TC Total, Nichols Extra, and WAR Alliance.

Mullins Angus Farm is a repeat winner of the Bartenslager Award, having also been honored in 2006.

Sheep Update

Dr. Scott P. Greiner

Extension Animal Scientist, VA Tech

Consignments Being Accepted for 2011 Virginia Ram Lamb Performance Test

Consignments are currently being accepted for the 2011 Virginia Ram Lamb Performance Test to be conducted at the Virginia Sheep Evaluation Station located at the Shenandoah Valley Agriculture Research and Extension Center near Steeles Tavern. Rams will be delivered to the test station in early May, and after a two week adjustment period, will be performance tested for 63 days. In addition to measurement of growth performance, rams will be evaluated for carcass traits with ultrasound during the test, and DNA genotyping will be conducted for spider syndrome and scrapie resistance. Eligible rams will sell in late August. Rams born September 1, 2010 to February 28, 2011 are eligible. For rules and regulations, as well as entry forms contact Scott Greiner at 540-231-9163. Entries are due April 15.

Virginia Performance Ram Lamb Test 2008-2010 Sale Summary

SALE RESULTS Breed Group	2010		2009		2008	
	No. Rams	Avg.	No. Rams	Avg.	No. Rams	Avg.
Winter Suffolk	20	\$459	22	\$289	17	\$265
Fall Suffolk					2	\$340
Fall Dorsets	6	\$478	5	\$314	3	\$310
Winter Dorsets	6	\$382	2	\$225	2	\$340
Winter Hampshire			1	\$220	2	\$230
Fall Katahdin					1	\$310
Winter Katahdins	3	\$303			2	\$205
Winter White Dorper	2	\$250				
Winter NC Cheviot	2	\$603				
Winter NC x Suff Cross	2	\$400				
Total Rams	41	\$433	30	\$287	29	\$275
Commercial Ewe Lambs	26	\$272				

Test and Sale Expense Summary

	2010	2009	2008
<u>Test Costs</u>			
Feed	\$86.00	\$80.21	\$87.81
Yardage	\$8.00	\$8.00	\$8.00
Codon 171/Spider Genotyping	\$11.00	\$16.00	\$16.00
Vet/Medical	\$4.10	\$3.23	\$2.57
Misc.	\$2.03	\$4.45	\$3.85
Total Test Costs	\$109.13	\$111.89	\$118.23
<u>Sale Costs</u>			
Shearing	\$5.50	\$5.50	\$5.00
Sale advertising, auctioneer, mailings, etc.	\$8.08	\$5.34	\$4.84
Registration Transfer	\$6.00	\$5.00	\$5.00
VA Check-off	\$0.50	\$0.50	\$0.50
Total Sale Expenses	\$20.08	\$16.34	\$15.34
Average Sale Price	\$432.93	\$286.67	\$275.17
Total Test & Sale Expenses	\$129.21	\$128.23	\$133.57
Average Net to Consignor	\$303.72	\$158.44	\$141.60