IMPACT
University of Idaho Extension

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Cattle Producers Learn To Select Efficient Creep Feeding Rations for Fall Born Calves

The Situation

The Idaho/Lewis County Total Beef Program Advisory Committee met in the fall of 2003 and discussed the issue of creep feeding fall born calves. A large percentage of producers in North Central Idaho fall calve and thus need to creep feed the calves during the winter. This is a huge expense to producers. The advisory committee recommended that a project be initiated to evaluate the most cost effective feed to use in a creep feeding ration.

Our Response

To address this issue a creep feeding demonstration project was organized and conducted in Idaho County during the winter and early spring of 2004. The purpose of the demonstration was to evaluate the calf performance and cost per pound of gain on various creep feeds that are used in North Central Idaho fed to fall born calves. Cooperating on this project were cattle ranchers Frank and Pam McIntire along with Phil and Bonnie Puckett. Both of these ranches are located in the Woodland area of Idaho County, which is near Kamiah, Idaho.

Five creep feeding treatments were selected for test. The treatments were:

Treatment 1. Whole Oats fed free choice
Treatment 2. Rolled Oats fed free choice
Treatment 3. Whole Oats limited intake with salt
Treatment 4. Rolled Barley limited intake with hand feeding
Treatment 5. 50% Whole Oats and 50% Rolled Barley fed free choice

The calves were weighed on test in January and divided into the five treatment groups. They were weighed off test the end of March to determine average daily gain for each treatment. Also, the amount of grain consumed was recorded; however the amount of hay consumed was not recorded due to the fact that the calves had free access to grass hay at all times.

Program Outcomes

The results showed that calves hand fed rolled barley gained the most weight at the least cost. This group of calves ate 2.7 pounds of barley each day along with free choice grass hay. The calves fed whole oats but had the intake limited with salt also performed well. The calves fed the barley and oat mix free choice and the free choice whole oats group performed essentially the same, however they realize slightly lower gains and higher cost per pound of gain than the first two treatments mentioned. The rolled oats group performed much poorer than any of the other groups.

It appears that hand feeding barley would be the creep feed and method of choice if the producer had the facilities and time to use this method. The limiting factor with this method is the time commitment to be available every day to feed the calves.

If producers want to fill a feeder and let the calves have access to the creep feed on a free choice basis, it is recommended to feed whole oats. The calves gain better on whole oats versus rolled oats and at a lower cost per pound of gain. Feeding whole oats would also reduce the digestive problems sometimes associated with feeding a barley/oats combination.

In North Central Idaho it is estimated that approximately 7,500 mother cows calve in the fall. The calves born from these cows have to be creep fed in the winter. If producers would self feed whole oats verses rolled oats it would be a savings of 6 cents per day per calf or $6 for a 100 day creep feeding period. If every producer adopted the use of whole oats verses rolled oats in a creep feeding program there would be a savings of $45,000 on the 7,500 fall born calves.

Table 1. 2004 Creep Feeding Demonstration Results

Treatment Number	Number of Calves	Average Start Wt.	Average End Wt.	Average ADG	Lbs Grain Per Day	Feed Cost/ LB Gain
1	49	365	523	1.9	6.02	$0.15
2	18	363	505	1.7	5.6	$0.18
3	24	365	522	1.9	3.8	$0.10
4	16	340	522	2.19	2.7	$0.08
5	43	351	520	2.04	4.4	$0.14

For More Information

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