SPRING 2022

TRI-COUNTY LIVESTOCK NEWSLETTER

Serving residents of Anson, Stanly and Union County

IN THIS ISSUE

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Upcoming Events

Title: Sweet Union Junior Jackpot Show
Description: Entry Information
https://sujackpot.theshowportal.com/
Date: March 26th and 27th
Location: Union County Special Events Center 307 Cultivation Circle Monroe, NC 28112

Title: Union County Cattlemen's Association Meeting
Description: Dark Water Enterprises will be speaking on Fertilization of Pastures. RSVP with Rachel at 704-283-3739
Date: March 17th
Location: Union County Special Events Center 307 Cultivation Circle Monroe, NC 28112

For any meeting or program listed, persons with disabilities may request accommodations to participate by contacting the Extension Office where the meeting will be held by phone, email, or in person at least 7 days prior to the event.

NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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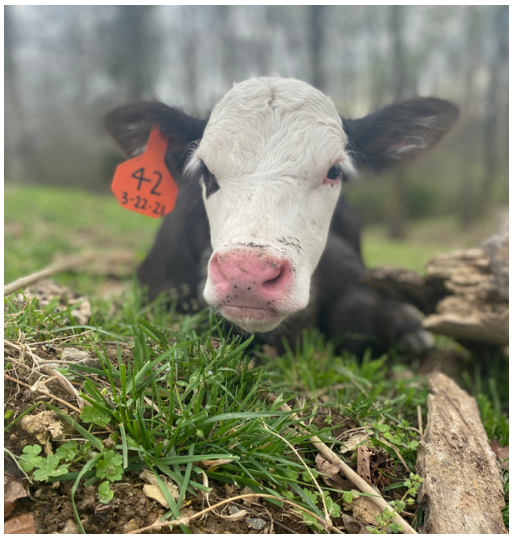
Getting Your Calves Ready to Sell

by Katelyn Stegall



Spring is the time to start thinking about getting your calves ready to sell in the coming summer months. A common question among cow-calf producers is how to add value to their cattle to increase profits. One step that producers can take is to precondition calves before they are sold. By definition, preconditioning calves is "a management method that prepares calves to enter the feedlot, reducing stress and disease susceptibility." In short, preconditioning is a time used to build the health of a calf before it is sold. Preconditioning programs can include weaning calves for at least 45 days, vaccination protocols, and feed bunker training. Bull calf castration and dehorning are also considered part of the preconditioning program.

There are some added costs associated with preconditioning such as the cost of vaccines, feed costs, and additional labor and these should be considered when planning a preconditioning program. Preconditioning calves before the sale can be beneficial in several ways. Producers selling preconditioned calves often receive added premiums at calf sales for preconditioning those calves, usually through feeder calf sales or similar special sale circumstances. Another benefit is increased calf weight. Since preconditioning results in healthier, less stressed calves, these animals put on and maintain weight easier than calves that are not preconditioned.

As stated, one component of preconditioning calves is weaning them for at least 45 days, and in some cases for at least 60 days. Weaning calves before sale decreases shrink when transported, resulting in higher sale weights than calves that are freshly weaned and transported. Weaning is a very stressful time for calves, so lower stress weaning strategies such as fence line weaning may be the best option if that is a possibility for your farm. If weaned calves are a requirement for the sale you will be participating in, check the regulations for weaning time.

Vaccinations are also an important piece of preconditioning calves. For most sales such as feeder calf sales, there will be requirements as to which vaccinations the calves receive, how many rounds of each, and the timeframe that they must be given in. If you do not have set protocols by the outlet you are using to sell your calves, work with your veterinarian to set up a vaccination program for preconditioning your calves. Bull calves will also need to be castrated and healed before the sale in a preconditioning program, and horned calves must be dehorned and healed.

Another, less recognized piece of a preconditioning program is training the calves to use a feed bunk and water trough. While this seems like something that should come naturally, and usually will, this is not always the case as the calves have relied on their mothers for everything they need. You can aid in familiarizing your calves with water troughs and feed bunks by placing them by fence lines so they are easier to find as calves are walking around fence lines, and making sure that they are highly visible to the calves. Adequate bunk space will also help to get your calves used to feed bunks and water troughs.

The demand for precondition calves is rising. While there are some costs associated with a preconditioning program, the benefits will be beneficial to the entire beef industry, from cow-calf to packers, and will be beneficial to the producer's bottom line!

Buttercup in Pastures

by Rachel Owens

Last year many people were dismayed to find a sea of yellow flowers in their pasture when spring rolled around. While buttercups can be pretty to look at, their toxicity to livestock and their invasive nature makes them a very unwanted sight in a pasture.

Buttercup is a short-lived perennial weed that behaves more like a winter annual. It begins to germinate in the fall and grows into the spring when the weather warms up. It has characteristic shiny, bright yellow flowers with five petals. This weed thrives in pastures where there is little competition, such as overgrazed areas or bare patches.

All parts of the plant are toxic to livestock and can cause blistering in the mouth and internal parts of the digestive tract, diarrhea, colic, and even death in extreme cases. However, buttercup is bitter and most animals will refuse to eat it as long as other forage options are available. The toxin that causes these issues will not be active when the buttercup is dried, so it is not a concern in hay.

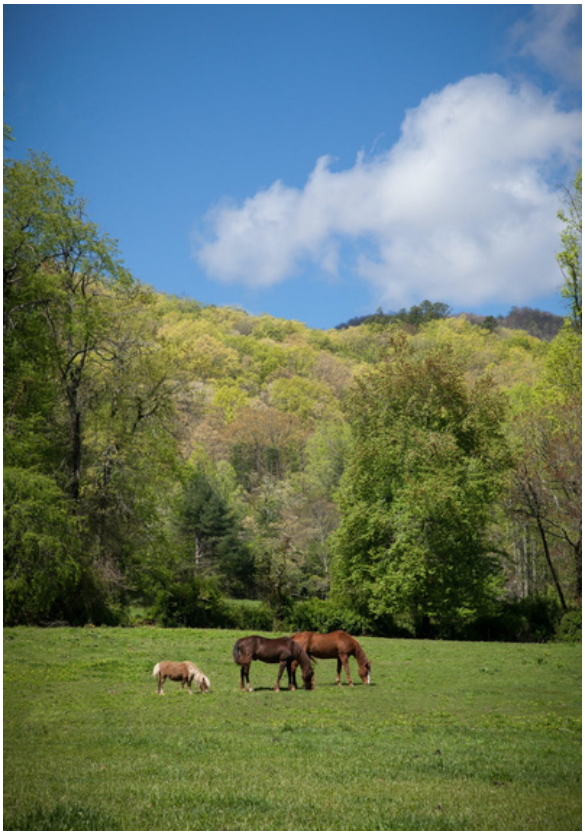
Since buttercup starts growing in the fall, it is important to have a thick stand of grass that will prevent the new seedlings from taking root. Proper fertilization and grazing management in the fall will help encourage this thick forage stand. Avoid overgrazing throughout the winter to prevent creating an environment that is favorable to buttercup growth.

When buttercups are present, mowing in the spring can help reduce flowers and therefore seed development. But mowing alone will not eliminate the plant and the problems it poses. Chemical control is a very effective strategy, but it is important to utilize this method early. Once it flowers, the plant is too mature for herbicides to have effective control. The ideal time to apply herbicides is late February through early March while the weeds are still small. 2,4-D is an effective herbicide that provides good control when applied early. Other effective herbicide options include aminopyralids (eg. GrazonNext), 2,4-D + dicamba (eg. WeedMaster), triclopyr (eg. Crossbow), or metsulfuron (eg. Cimmaron). Picking the right product can depend on other weeds you need to control at the same time.

If your pasture had issues with buttercup last year, you can count on them being back again this year. Start scouting early and be prepared to utilize control methods. If infestations have been heavy in the past, do not expect this problem to go away after one herbicide application. It can take several years of timely chemical control to get the buttercup under control. Always encourage a thick healthy stand of grass to help reduce weed pressure.

Introducing Horses to Spring Pastures

by Kinsey Everhart



Spring pastures are right around the corner! Green pastures bring high nutrition and less hay feeding. However, several problems also tend to arise this time of year. Horses that have been on dry lots can colic due to sudden changes in their diet and gut microbiome. Another common problem for horses with metabolic disorders is laminitis or founder.

Horses that have been kept on pasture all winter generally adapt well to the changing grass composition. However, these horses should still be monitored closely and changes should be made when necessary. Fortunately, there are several ways you can mitigate the risk of these diet change in horses kept in a stall or in a dry lot over the winter.

1. **Don't turn out a hungry horse:** Feed hay before turning your horse out on pasture
2. **Limit grazing time:** Only allow horses to graze 15 to 20 minutes when you start introducing them to spring pastures. Gradually increase the time by 15 minutes each day until horses are out 4 to 5 hours.
3. **Graze in the morning:** Spring grasses can be high in nonstructural carbohydrates. NSCs are highly digestible energies that taste good and lead to over eating. These nutrients build up in the plant throughout the day because they are produced by photosynthesis. During the dark hours, plant use up these nutrients so the morning is a good time for horses with metabolic diseases to graze.
4. **Consider overnight temperatures:** Plants aren't able to utilize NSCs if night time temperatures are below 40 degrees F leading to sugars and fructans to build up.
5. **Good pasture management:** Forages that remains in a vegetative stage tend to have less stored carbohydrates because the plant can utilize them in growth. Also, fructans are found in higher concentrations closer to the ground. When a pasture is over grazed it forces horses to eat those high fructan concentrations.
6. **Grazing muzzles can be great tools:** Muzzles can take a lot of work and getting used to, but they can be a life saver for some horses. They work well when drylots are not an option or in combination with drylots. Muzzles can be worn on a continuous bases up to 10 hours, but make sure the fit is right.

For the health of your pasture, grazing should not happen until forages reach at least 6 inches. Pastures should also not be grazed below 3 to 4 inches. For adequate regrowth, plants need leaf area to photosynthesize. Grazing too early will deplete the energy that is stored in the plant to regrow. This allows weeds to grow and out compete the desirable forage which leads to reduced stand quality and yield. Even though you horse may be looking over the fence longingly for lush green pasture it is in their best interest to manage them and the pasture appropriate for everyone's health and wellbeing.