



# Southeast Cattle Advisor

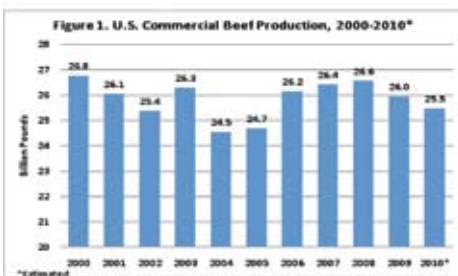
## Cattle Market Outlook 2010: Tangled in Economic Recovery

Dr. Walt Prevatt, Auburn University and Dr. Curt Lacy, University of Georgia

Attempting to assess the cattle market outlook for 2010 is like trying to untangle the infinite number of knots and twists in a tangled fishing line. There are indeed a number of factors affecting the cattle market outlook for 2010, including the level of beef production, cattle numbers, beef demand, competing meats, grain prices, economic recovery, input costs, exchange rates, weather and many others.

### 2010 Beef Production

U.S. commercial beef production is expected to decline to 25.5 billion pounds (-1.9%) during 2010 (Figure 1). Fed cattle and cull cow slaughter are estimated to decline by 1 percent and 8 percent, respectively. Assuming normal feedlot placements, beef production is expected to be slightly lower during all four quarters this year. Net beef supply (domestic beef production plus beef imports minus beef exports) is also expected to decline due to a decrease in domestic production and an increase in beef exports. A minimal increase may be realized in beef imports this year.



### Cattle Numbers

The Jan. 1 cattle report by USDA revealed an inventory of all cattle and

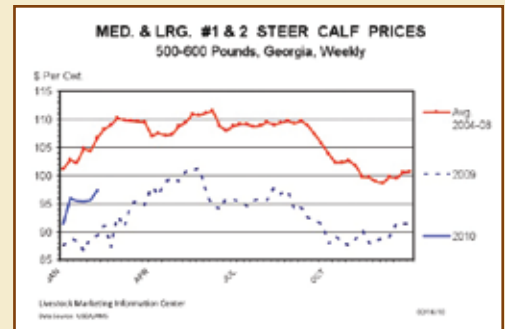
calves of 93.7 million head, 1 percent lower than 2009. This decline reflects an overall lack of profitability due to higher operating costs and lower prices in the beef and dairy industries in recent years.

Beef cow numbers were 31.4 million, the lowest in 46 years. These lower numbers are reflected in the calf crop, which was reported at 35.8 million, the lowest crop since 1950. Feeder cattle and calves outside of feedlots came in at 27.5 million head, down slightly from a year ago. However, carcass beef production is expected to increase 5 to 8 pounds per carcass, which adds about 200 million to 250 million pounds of beef production.

These reduced supplies should be viewed as positives for beef producers. As the economy improves and demand increases, the tight supplies should translate into higher prices for finished and feeder cattle as well as calves.

### Beef Demand

Demand for beef during 2009 significantly weakened due to the recession. Reduced consumer spending, especially in fine dining restaurants, lowered the value of beef. Consumers also selected lower-cost products, such as hamburgers, roasts and sausage. The decline in demand is expected to slow during the first half of 2010 and should show improvement during the second half of 2010. Economic recovery and trade relations are keys to improvements in beef demand. The



Item	Price
<b>SALES PRICES</b>	
<i>Cattle and Beef Prices as reported by USDA-Agricultural Marketing Service and Georgia Department of Agriculture</i>	
GA 500-600 lbs. steer (\$/Cwt.)	\$104.99
GA 700-800 lbs. steer (\$/Cwt.)	\$89.45
GA 80-85% lean slaughter cow (\$/Cwt.)	\$56.83
GA Bred cow, Med.-Lrg, 1-2, 4-6 mos. bred (\$/head)	\$571.70
GA Cow-calf pairs, Med.-Lrg, 1-2, (\$/pair)	\$859.61
5-area Live Cattle Price (\$/Cwt.)	\$89.78
Choice Boxed Beef Cutout (\$/Cwt.)	\$144.58
Choice-Select Spread (\$/Cwt.)	\$1.77
<b>INPUTS</b>	
Farm Diesel (\$/gallon), less than 1,000 gallons	\$2.15-\$2.40
<i>Feed Stuffs as reported by USDA-Alabama Department of Agriculture Market News, FOB Central AL unless otherwise denoted.</i>	
Hay for cows, Good quality (9-13% CP), (\$/1,000 lbs. roll)	\$40.00
#2 Yellow corn (\$/bushel)	\$4.60-\$4.90
Soybean hull pellets, bulk (\$/ton)	\$155.00
Corn Gluten pellets, 21% protein, bulk (\$/ton)	\$164-\$170
Whole Cottonseed, FOB Gin (\$/ton) \$165	\$180-\$230
Distillers' Dry Grain, FOB Mid-South GA (\$/ton)	\$160.00
Cottonseed Meal FOB Central GA (\$/ton)	\$290.00
<i>Fertilizer prices as reported by USDA-Alabama Department of Agriculture Market News. All prices \$/ton unless otherwise noted.</i>	
Ammonium nitrate (34-0-0)	\$305-\$360
DAP (18-46-0)	\$365-\$421
Muriate of Potash (0-0-60)	\$610-\$780
Lime (spread)	\$30-\$45

continued on next page

For week ended: February 19, 2010

strength of the U.S. dollar will impact the level of all meat exports. Current expectations are for beef exports to lead the way to improvements in beef demand in the near future. Global beef consumption is expected to increase significantly during the next decade if economic growth returns.

### Competing Meats

Pork production during 2010 is expected to decline to 22.6 billion pounds (-1.6% from a year ago). Broiler production is expected to show a slight increase to 35.9 billion pounds (+1% from a year ago). However, uncertainties about poultry exports to Russia due to the Russian ban placed on U.S. poultry exports may alter poultry production plans by U.S. integrators. Russia received one-fourth of our poultry exports in 2009. The decreases in U.S. meat production (beef, pork and poultry) during 2009 were very price supportive. Any additional declines in meat production will help further support meat prices.

### Grain Prices

The 2009 corn crop set a record at 13.15 billion bushels, according to USDA. The National Ag Statistics Service recently reported that the acreage, yield, production and stocks estimates for corn and soybeans may be revised in the March 10 crop production report because of significant unharvested acres of corn and soybeans across several key states as of late November. A watchful eye on this report will help guide cattle farmers on managing feed grain prices. Regardless of the record crops, U.S. and world stocks remain historically low, which will support prices. Some volatility in grain and oilseed prices is expected this spring as grain and oilseed markets once again face an acreage battle.

### Cattle Prices

Cattle prices for all classes of cattle are expected to average higher in 2010 compared with a year ago. Some demand weakness may be incurred during the first quarter of 2010 that could depress prices temporarily, but supply decreases and potential improvement in beef demand during the remaining quarters should result in



higher cattle prices. Additionally, the declining inventory of cattle and calves should bolster cattle prices in the near future.

### Economic Recovery

The consensus among business economists attending the Chicago Fed's annual Economic Outlook Symposium revealed that domestic economic growth is expected in 2010 and unemployment is predicted to peak early and edge lower the remainder of the year. Inflation is expected to increase modestly later this year.

Many economists say that the U.S. recovery will follow the international recovery. The recovery will likely be slow and filled with unpredictable hurdles. Some risks that may further delay or test the economic recovery include the fragility in financial markets, rising unemployment, lack of growth in small businesses, higher rates of personal saving, losses in commercial real estate and rising commodity prices.

### Final Thoughts

Many cattle farmers are feeling the hardships caused by the rise in input prices and the decline in output market prices due to extremely poor economic conditions. Some relief is expected in this cost-price squeeze situation. However, this is probably not the time to plan for expansion unless you are already making a reasonable profit.

Cattle farmers should not count on "higher prices" to save them or keep them going. Input costs will likely rise in the near future due to competition and inflation. Continued efforts to adopt improved management practices (breeding season, genetics, health, forage utilization, value added, etc.) will be needed to remain or become profitable. A low-cost producer will achieve profitability faster.

Any improvement in 2010 cattle market prices will be dependent on domestic and foreign economic recovery. The timing and extent of the recovery is highly uncertain. The consensus among most economists is that recovery will be slow. Fortunately, cattle market prices will be supported by cyclically lower beef supplies and should average higher than 2009. Any improvement in beef demand in 2010 and beyond will further improve prices. ●

## Prepare for the Breeding Season

Dr. Cliff Lamb, Extension Beef Specialist, University of Florida

The goal of most cow-calf producers is to ensure that every cow gives birth to a live calf every year. In the U.S. beef production system, cows must give birth to a live calf, start their estrous cycles after birth, become pregnant during the breeding season and maintain the pregnancy until birth all within a year. All these factors contribute to the reproductive efficiency of cattle operations. Most farm economists demonstrate that those producers that are most effective at ensuring that a greater percentage of cows calve annually within a short calving season are more economically efficient.

Of all the factors that contribute to reproductive efficiency in beef cattle operations, the primary factor is the ability of cows to initiate estrous cycles after they give birth in a timely manner. Cows may begin their estrous cycles as early as three weeks after birth, but also may not start cycling until five months after calving.



Nutritional status and the presence of a suckling calf are the primary factors that contribute to how fast a cow initiates her estrous cycles.

Other factors that may play a role are climate (extreme warm weather depresses reproductive efficiency), cow age (younger cows are still growing and take longer to start cycling), breed (some cattle breeds tend to take longer to start cycling than other breeds), and anything that may stress the cows to inhibit initiating estrous cycles. It is critical that after calving and prior to the beginning of the breeding season producers should monitor their nutritional management to ensure that cows are receiving adequate nutrients for maintenance, lactation and for assisting initiating estrous cycles after birth.

Planning for the breeding season is critical to the economic viability of cattle operations. The length of the breeding season may have a tremendous impact on numerous aspects of a cattle producer's management system. In many cases, producers may not remove bulls from their cowherd resulting in a calving season that does not end. In other words, calves may be born at any time during the year. From a marketing standpoint, this is extremely detrimental and is a major reason that producers fail to realize the true value of their calves. A more desirable reproductive management tool is to have a breeding season that limits the time of exposure that the bull has with cows. This can either occur to ensure that calves are born during a more ideal time of year that suits each producer. For example, all cows may calve either during the spring or fall.

Most common breeding seasons range from 60 to 120 days. The advantages of a breeding season are numerous. By concentrating all cows calving during a specific period of time producers take advantage of marketing opportunities by selling uniform lots of cattle. Calves born within a short window of time out of similar genetics

are more uniform and buyers tend to be attracted to those cattle than small lots of cattle at auction.

To reduce your breeding season, identify when your most desirable calving season would occur. Consider the dates for the breeding season and remove bulls on those dates. Strategic culling of late calving and open cows will assist in reducing the breeding and calving seasons. In addition, for those producers seeking a breeding season of less than 60 days, they should seriously consider estrous synchronization. These tips may pay dividends in shortening the calving season, enhancing calf crop uniformity and reducing labor during the calving season, ultimately improving profitability of cow-calf operations.

To optimize reproductive efficiency during the breeding season and subsequent longevity of cows in the herd, producers should consider the following checklist prior to breeding:

- 1) Define your breeding season based on when you would like your cows to calve and be diligent about maintaining your defined season.
- 2) Consider breeding replacement heifers two to three weeks prior to breeding the mature cowherd
- 3) Target your heifers to be at a Body Condition Score of 5.5 to 6 and weigh 60 to 65 percent of their mature body weight at breeding.
- 4) Prior to breeding, ensure that heifers and cows are on an increasing plan of nutrition.
- 5) Consider using estrous synchronization to tighten up the calving season and "kick starting" non-cycling cows to start cycling.
- 6) If you use estrous synchronization systems, remember that some of the more desirable protocols are initiated as much as 30 days prior to the start of breeding.
- 7) All bulls (including older herd bulls) should undergo a breeding soundness exam within 30 days of the breeding season. ●

# What Does It Cost to Develop a Replacement Heifer?

Dr. Matt Hersom and Dr. Todd Thrift, Department of Animal Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville

The debate about raising or purchasing replacement heifers can consume hours of conversation and pages of newsletters. However, one aspect that is often overlooked or poorly understood is the practical production costs associated with raising a replacement heifer from the cow herd. There are considerations and real costs that beef cattle producers need to know to make an informed decision whether to raise or purchase.

## Ability

Do you have the wherewithal to develop replacement heifers? Heifers are a different animal than the mature cow and need different levels of management. Heifers require closer attention in the areas of growth, health and nutrition to meet development program goals. Nutritional programs for heifers are often tailored to meet the growth requirements to move a 500-pound calf to an 800-pound heifer that is physiologically ready to be bred.

This nutritional regime can necessitate improved feeding equipment (feed bunks, hay rings, feed storage) that might not be required for the cow herd. Heifers require additional management inputs for health processing. Are you prepared to accept the additional labor and time investment to adequately vaccinate, observe and treat sick heifers? Does your operation have the resources to manage heifers separate from the mature cow herd? Developing replacement heifers have different nutritional requirements, social dominance and breeding management issues that indicate separate management from mature cows.

## Genetics

When raising a replacement heifer out of the cow herd, a number of genetic issues should be considered. First, is she good enough to go back into the herd or are there better genetics to be had? How does this heifer alter the overall genetic base of the cow herd? Is she just as good as the top 20 percent of herd cows, average or just another cow? Second, what was her sire type? If she is from a terminal

type sire, this heifer may not fit the production environment that the cow herd experiences annually.

Finally, bulls with lower birth weight EPD's and smaller actual birth weight should be utilized on heifers. So do you have the bull power to necessary to be utilized on both replacement heifers and mature cows? Much of the improvement in the annual calf crop can be accomplished with improved bull selection, but turn over in the cow herd and improvements in genetics must be considered, too.

## Economics

If you've determined that you have the ability and the cow herd has the genetic base to develop replacement heifers, the final consideration is economic. Considerations for feed costs, forage/pasture costs and other finances need to be considered.

Below is a very simple table of costs that need to be included in the decision to raise or purchase replacement heifers. This simple example presents the cost associated with taking a heifer from weaning until 60 d post-breeding (pregnancy check time).

For this example we will assume that we have 100 potential replacement heifers at weaning, start the development program in early November, initiate the breeding season in March, and manage these heifers through pregnancy check in late May. There will be a 1 percent assumed death loss and 10 percent of the heifers will

not be pregnant and can be marketed. What this example leaves out are the labor costs associated with managing the replacement heifer group and the infrastructure required to manage the heifers as a separate group.

Looking at this example, the largest proportion (54%) of the cost is associated with retaining the calf. Feed costs alone to develop heifers account for 25 percent of the total cost with pasture costs reaching nearly 17 percent (feed and land equaling 42%) of the production cost to get a heifer from weaning to breeding. All other cost (health, breeding, interest, death) amounted to just less than 5 percent of total cost. Key control points in determining the feasibility of raising replacement heifers are the current calf prices at weaning and projected feed costs.

Compare this brief analysis and your particular labor and financial situation to what purchasing a breed heifer would cost.

Obviously, in the Gulf Coast region forage resources, supplement availability and differences in calving season will vary these costs considerably. What is imperative is that as a beef cattle producer interested in developing replacement heifers, you know and accurately tract what your costs are related to your operation. In this scenario, could bred replacement heifers of the same genetic quality be purchased for less than \$800? ●

Example of simple costs associated with developing a replacement heifer

Item	Amount	Description
Calf cost	\$450.00	500 lb calf valued at \$0.85/lb
· Supplement	\$71.55	Priced at \$180/ton fed at 4.5 lb/hd for 150 days and 2 lb/hd for 60 days
· Forage	\$200.00	Hay priced at \$45/900 lb bale, fed for 150 days, 4,000 total lbs offered
· Mineral	\$10.50	Mineral priced at \$20/50 lbs, fed for 210 days, 2 oz./day
Total Feed	\$282.05	210 days of feeding, heifers gaining 1.75 lb/day
Land Pasture	\$10.81	Opportunity cost to use land. Priced at \$20/acre, 0.5 ac/heifer for 5 mo., 2 ac/heifer for 2 mo.
Health	\$15.00	Vaccinations, de-worming, etc.
Breeding	\$12.00	Bull cost
Opportunity Cost	\$6.47	Interest on calf value at weaning, 2.5% interest for 210 days (weaning to breeding time period)
Death Loss	\$4.25	1% death loss on 100 heifers calculated at purchase
Non-Pregnant Heifers	+\$5.33	800 lb at \$0.60/lb spread across the remaining 90 heifers
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 775.25</b>	<b>Cost to take a heifer from post-weaning to pregnancy in late spring</b>

## How Does Your Forage Measure Up?

Joe Vendramini, University of Florida

Winter is here. Warm-season forages are dormant, and many producers in the Southeast are feeding conserved forages to meet their cowherd's nutrient requirements. Hay is the most popular source of conserved forage for beef cattle producer. While reducing the need for hay is desirable, some quantity of hay is required to avert risk in most livestock production systems. In addition, haylage (50% DM) has been widely used by beef cattle producers to preserve forage during the summer when climatic conditions are not ideal for hay production.

Regardless of the management practice used to conserve and feed forage during the winter, some concentrate supplementation is commonly necessary to meet the cow-calf requirements. An estimate of the nutrients present in the forage is essential to maximize the efficiency of concentrate supplementation. The most accurate way to predict forage nutritive value is through FORAGE TESTING. Many producers allege that they own the forage and it will be fed anyway, so why to test?

Two different scenarios can happen when you do not have an estimate of the forage nutritive value: 1) The forage has high nutritive value and the producer will be overfeeding concentrate. 2) The forage has low nutritive

value and the concentrate is not supplementing the cow adequately. In the first scenario, the producer inflates the production cost without benefits in production. In the second scenario, the cows decrease body condition, pregnancy rates and finally results in few calves harvested and consequently decrease in profitability.

Beyond understanding the nutrient value of your forage, it is valuable to understand how your forage samples compare with others submitted to the laboratory. This procedure allows producers to verify if the current management practices used to produce conserved forage have been effective to optimize forage nutritive value. The average nutritive value for the forage samples submitted to the Forage Extension Laboratory in Ona, FL, is presented in Table 1.

### How to Collect a Sample

Properly collecting and identifying a sample is very important. A sampling device or tool is needed for collecting hay samples. Several commercial types are available. They usually consist of a tube with a cutting edge on one end and a shank on the other that is fastened in the chuck of an electric drill or hand brace. The sampler is driven into the end of a rectangular bale or the rounded side of the round bale. Collect a single core sample from each of 12 bales for a particular lot of hay. Combine the 12 cores into one sample. This will ensure that the sample is representative. The outer layer of weathered round bales should be pulled away before sampling. Each hay cutting, type of hay, etc. should be sampled and analyzed separately. Each hay cutting or lot should be identified and stored separately.

Silage samples can be collected from the face of a bunker silo as it is



being fed and from the unloader of an upright silo. Bagged silage can be sampled by cutting small slits along the side of the bag and penetrating the hay sampler to collect the material. Producers must reseal the slit with waterproof tape after collection. Collect silage from 5 or 6 places along the bag, mix well and extract a single sample to send to the laboratory. Immediately place the sample in a plastic bag and seal it. If not mailed right away, place the sample in a refrigerator or freezer.

Pasture samples can be collected and analyzed by plucking the forage with your fingers at the height the animals are grazing it. When adequate pasture forage is available, cattle may select better nutritive value forage than what is being sampled by hand plucking. A practical example of selection can be found in limpgrass pastures with good forage availability. In this example, cattle will typically select leaves that have greater nutritive value than hand-plucked samples collected with leaves and stems. In this case, forage testing results may suggest that cattle would respond to protein supplementation, but the animals are consuming adequate amounts of protein from forage selection and may not respond to supplementation.

Scissors or some other cutting device also could be used. If possible, these samples should be dried before sending to the laboratory. If drying is not possible, mail the sample immediately after it is harvested.

Remember, your results are only as good as your sample! ●

**Table 1.** Dry matter (DM), crude protein (CP), total digestible nutrients (TDN), acid detergent fiber (ADF), and neutral detergent fiber (NDF) of forage samples submitted to the Forage Extension Laboratory at the RCREC – Ona, FL (Oct., 2006 to July 2008)

Forage Species <sup>1</sup>	Number of Samples	%				
		DM	CP	TDN	ADF	NDF
<b>Bahiagrass<sup>2</sup></b>						
Hay	36	85 ± 4	7.5 ± 2.4	49 ± 5	-	-
Pasture	8	24 ± 2	9.2 ± 0.8	53 ± 3	-	-
<b>Bermudagrass</b>						
Hay	82	89 ± 2	10.3 ± 3.5	53 ± 7	44 ± 5	79 ± 3
Silage-Haylage	18	31 ± 5	8.8 ± 1.8	50 ± 3	45 ± 1	77 ± 1
<b>Stargrass</b>						
Hay	18	84 ± 2	9.6 ± 2.7	53 ± 5	50 ± 2	73 ± 3
Pasture	26	36 ± 3	13.1 ± 3.6	58 ± 7	50 ± 20	68 ± 15
Silage-Haylage	56	34 ± 8	10.1 ± 2.5	57 ± 7	52 ± 13	69 ± 18
<b>Limpgrass</b>						
Hay	48	83 ± 3	4.2 ± 1.2	54 ± 6	38 ± 5	78 ± 8
Pasture	13	35 ± 3	7.5 ± 1.3	57 ± 3	-	-
Silage-Haylage	28	40 ± 4	6.1 ± 0.9	49 ± 6	40 ± 4	70 ± 6
<b>Corn</b>						
Silage-Haylage	18	28 ± 2	8.4 ± 0.8	75 ± 5	28 ± 1	48 ± 9

<sup>1</sup>ADF and NDF analysis performed only on samples submitted by dairy producers. Bahiagrass was not analyzed for these nutrient constituents.

---

## Late-Winter Forage Management Tips

John Andrae, Extension Forage Specialist, Clemson University



**M**any cattlemen assume that pasture and hay management is only necessary while forages are actively growing. There are several easy and effective practices that can be applied in late winter to improve forage production. Here is a list of forage management reminders that can be applied now.

1) Use controlled grazing to improve utilization of winter annual pastures. Rye, wheat, oats and ryegrass are high-quality forages and should be treated as such. Restrict grazing access of mature cows that have access to dry hay to two hours per day. Grazing on alternate days is also an acceptable management practice to stretch hay supplies.

2) Consider a spring nitrogen application for winter annual pastures. Heavy December and January rains across the Southeast have likely leached most residual nitrogen from fall applications. Additional nitrogen will likely be beneficial for good spring growth.

3) Finalize preparations for spring bermudagrass sprigging. Smooth fields, test soils and reserve sprigs of a high-quality variety. This is also the last opportunity to incorporate any needed limestone.

4) Check existing bermudagrass pastures for health. February is an excellent month to determine bermudagrass stand density. Dormant bermudagrass color is distinctly different from crabgrass, broomsedge

and many other weeds. Pastures are also closely grazed in February, which allows for easy stand evaluation. If bermudagrass appears thin or irregular, conduct a soil test and follow recommendations.

5) Consider burning bermudagrass hayfields. Fire is an excellent tool to decrease winter annual weeds, hasten spring green up, decrease spittlebug pressure and release nutrients bound in thatch. Be sure to follow all safety precautions and burn in favorable weather. Contact your state's forestry commission for more information on burn bans and safety.

6) Consider broadcasting red or white clover into closely grazed tall fescue pastures. Frost seeding is probably the most effective method for establishing legumes in tall fescue pastures. Red clover has higher yields and seedling vigor than white clover and will provide grazing into summer months. White clover is tolerant of close grazing and will persist two years or more depending on variety selection and management.

7) Begin site preparation for establishing bahiagrass or seed-type bermudagrass varieties. Several good seed-type bermudagrass varieties are on the market and are suitable for planting in piedmont and mountain areas. Be aware seed types are cheaper to establish than hybrids, but there is risk of stand loss during the establishment year from crabgrass

competition. Seeded bermudagrass typically yield substantially less than hybrids. Seed-type varieties have not persisted well in the Coastal Plain, but bahiagrass is an excellent perennial warm season forage for grazing in this area. Several new bahiagrass varieties (Tifton 9, Tifquick, Riatta etc.) are now available.

8) Fertilize tall fescue for spring hay and pasture production. This is particularly useful in mild weather, when good late-winter production can occur.

9) Avoid grazing newly planted tall fescue until plants are well rooted. This allows proper plant establishment for improved summer survival. Periodic light grazing is helpful after plants are well rooted. Light grazing can stimulate new shoot growth and decrease pressure from palatable weed species. New tall fescue plantings can also be harvested for hay in late spring at the early boot stage. Do not delay hay harvest of new tall fescue plantings until plants reach full maturity. Late harvests favor crown shading and result in slow regrowth and open stands which are favorable for weed encroachment.

10) Begin planning to replace toxic tall fescue fields this fall. Friendly endophyte technology remains the "gold standard" for cool season perennial pastures in the Southeast. A spray-smother-spray replacement approach is one method used to totally eliminate toxic tall fescue stands. This renovation process begins in spring months, so begin planning for herbicide applications and smother crop seed. A relatively new establishment plan allows producers to prevent viable seed production in the spring through mowing. Two glyphosate applications are then applied at a 4- to 6-week interval in late summer to eliminate fescue. Failure to plan for fall plantings will limit fall variety choices to toxic tall fescue varieties.

More information, including management practices, variety selection, etc., can be found at your local county Extension office. ●

# Keep the Record Straight on Your Herd

Lawton Stewart and Ronnie Silcox, Extension Animal Scientists, The University of Georgia



As we enter the winter months, many producers have weaned last year's calf crop and are getting ready for the spring calving season. In preparation for next year's calves, some questions should be asked: Did I make a profit last year? Which cow weaned the most valuable calf? What was my calf crop percentage? What cows are open? Which ones should be culled? These are serious questions that will affect the bottom line of any operation. Unfortunately, some producers cannot answer them. That's because records are not kept properly or at all. Keeping records can be as simple or difficult as you make it and can be done with three basic items/steps:



**1. Identification.** Identify all cattle. This is as simple as an ear tag. Some producers use double tags or tattoos to make identification more permanent.

**2. The little Redbook.** Available through NCBA or other organizations, this date book is an excellent tool to keep in your pocket or in a vehicle to record basic data while managing cows and calves. There are sophisticated computer programs available at a reasonable cost, too, but a manual record, such as a Red Book, is the place to start.

**3. What to keep and how to record it.** Know what to record and have a permanent media to keep the records. The essential information needed to describe the cow and her calf start with ear tag numbers of both, birth date, sex of calf and color and marking used for identification. The chart on the following page gives examples of how to set these records up. These can be paper based or incorporated into a computer spreadsheet.



The concept of record keeping ties to all aspects of management, but in general, it is important in three major areas:

- 1. Finances and taxes.** In combination with production cost records, it aids in financial decisions and tax preparations.
- 2. Management decisions.** It helps us understand the performance of individual cows and helps make decisions associated with culling and breeding decision.
- 3. Marketing.** The concept of utilizing records in marketing is becoming more and more important. Age and Source Verification programs, as the name implies, relies on record keeping to verify these data. Cattle in the Georgia Beef Cattle program typically received \$25/head for Age and Source verification. Other programs, such as process verified programs, require records of a vaccination program and processing.

These programs are commonly verified through a third party such as The Southeastern Livestock Network.

With the spring calving season right around the corner, it is an excellent time to get your record keeping strategy in place before the calves hit the ground. Being able to track animals and their production may payoff more than you think.

*continued on next page*



# 59th Annual Florida Beef Cattle Short Course

May 5-7, 2010 · UF Conference Center, Gainesville, FL

## Preparing for the Next Decade: Trends, Tools and Technologies

**The economy is down. Cattle prices are suffering, and input prices are up. What's in store for the beef industry, and what management decisions can you make to weather the storm? The answers are at the 59th Annual Florida Beef Cattle Short Course.**

Continuing the rich tradition of quality programs from the University of Florida Department of Animal Sciences addressing issues facing the beef cattle industry, this year's course will be May 5-7, starting at the UF Conference Center in Gainesville, FL.

Wednesday afternoon starts with a Market Outlook from CattleFax and continues with a look at the current situation of agricultural lending for livestock enterprises in the Southeast. Then, there will be a discussion from a national beef processor about the commitment to source and produce quality beef and current beef processor trends. The afternoon concludes with a discussion

on the potential impact the federal Cap and Trade environmental legislation may have on cattle production. Following the program, the Allied Trade Show allows participants to interact and exchange information during the evening reception.

The Thursday morning program concentrates on the potential for pasture finishing beef cattle in the Southeast. It starts with an overview of pasture/fed finishing programs and continues by taking up forage management that is necessary for pasture-based systems. The program addresses many of the practical management decisions that are required for pasture-based systems. The morning concludes

with a discussion about the carcass merit and potential markets for pasture finished beef products.

Thursday afternoon, a variety of topics, tools and technologies will be discussed and demonstrated in a hands-on environment. The annual Cattlemen's Steakout on Thursday evening provides an event for all participants to enjoy a prime rib dinner and time for conversation, rumination and relaxation.

Because production fundamentals are important anytime, Friday's program takes on the topics of nutrition, minerals, health, reproduction, and the environment.



To register, visit <http://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/beef/reg.htm>, call (352) 392-2390 or e-mail [hersom@ufl.edu](mailto:hersom@ufl.edu).

This newsletter is a collaborative effort between cooperating universities, USDA-CSREES and the Southern Region Risk Management Education Center.

