

## **Cattle Business in Mississippi – February 2016**

### **“Beef Production Strategies” article**

## **New Year’s Day Traditions**

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For as long as I can remember, every New Year has started the exact same way - eating peas, greens, and hog jowl. While there is a lot of folklore regarding the reasoning behind the dinner items, it is one of those traditions that I hold dear. As I enjoyed my New Year celebration this year, I reflected on how these Southern meal traditions are applicable to our cattle operations.

**Black-eyed peas:** If you have never researched the reasoning of the black-eyed peas importance to the New Year dinner menu, I encourage you to do so. From Jewish folklore to Civil War tales, the common denominator was the peas represented prosperity. For the last couple of years, the beef industry has experienced some very prosperous times. From record high selling feeder calves to huge demand for replacement females, times were good for cow/calf producers. In fact, according to an AgWeb Daily article, 2015 will go down as the 2nd most profitable of all time for the cow/calf sector of the beef industry. Some have referred to the market we experienced as an anomaly, or a perfect storm. Economists across the country are predicting significantly lower prices for feeder calves in 2016, but still expect the cow/calf producers to be profitable. After major herd liquidation, from 2010-2014, and now an expected 2.5-3% increase in the cattle inventory last year, it can be assumed that the cow herd is more efficient and more genetically superior than ever before!

**Greens:** Love them or hate them, eating greens was a must at my grandmother’s house on New Year’s Day. Greens represent money. While I am not sure if eating greens ever directly affected my revenues, it is something I am not willing to chance! My mom always reminds us that in many case it’s what you spend, not what you earn, that makes a difference. In 2016, one of my primary resolutions is to waste less. I think we can all apply this to many aspects of our daily lives. The first thing I think about is food (this can apply to myself or cattle). One way to reduce wasted resources on our farms is developing a defined calving season. A controlled calving season starts with a controlled breeding season. To establish this you should first determine when your cows are currently calving and work with their current level of production. If your cows are calving

mostly in the summer months, I would recommend moving them to a fall calving system. The basis of any successful breeding and calving season is dependent on a record keeping system.

**Hog jowl:** Hawg jaw, as we called it, is always a staple on our table. Hog jowl is symbolic to moving forward and not looking back. The folk take explains that when pigs root forward when foraging, they make a positive motion. 2015 will be a year that we'll look back on for many years. It will be a year we can tell future generations about the record high cattle prices. While it will be difficult not to think about what we did last year, we still need to realize that we've come a long way in the last few years. Consumers love beef and have faith in our farmers.

I hope that your New Year is off to a great start! Personally and professionally, I am looking forward to all 2016 has to offer. One of my personal goals for 2016 is to visit every county in Mississippi before this time next year. We have a busy first quarter planned and are looking forward to providing you with the very best programs in 2016! Happy New Year!

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For more information about beef cattle production, contact an office of the Mississippi State University Extension Service.