

Cattle Business in Mississippi – August 2016
“Beef Production Strategies” article
Cure for the Summertime Blues

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Over the last couple of weeks it seems like many cattle farmers I have talked to have a cases of the “summertime blues”. While they seem to vary in the severity, many producers are ‘blue’ about the cattle market, the summer’s heat, pests like army worms and flies. From a governmental standpoint, producers are concerned about issues like trade and the new Veterinary Feed Directive. Even though Alan Jackson would argue there “ain’t no cure for the summertime blues”, I would argue that I can cure my blues by focusing on preparing for winter feeding, gearing up for fall calves, and weaning spring calves.

To me nothing cures summertime blues like planning for winter feeding. With late July rains, many farmers should be able to get another cutting of hay from summer perineal grasses. If enough hay is stored for your cattle, consider stockpiling your Bermuda and Bahia grasses. Not only could this decrease the amount of stored hay needed for winter, stockpiling will be significantly less expensive than baling and storing hay. To stockpile, apply additional nitrogen fertilizer to grasses after the last hay cutting. For Bermuda Grass it is recommended to apply 60-80 pounds of actual nitrogen per acre during the month of August. Scientists at the Noble Foundation recommend that that cattle should not have access to stockpiled summer pastures until the first killing freeze, which causes the grasses to go into a dormant stage. This stockpiled pasture would probably be most ideal for spring calving, dry cows. For fall calving systems, protein and energy should be supplemented.

If your cows and heifers are part of a fall calving season, August is the perfect time to gather supplies and gear. Re-stocking my calving kit with new ear tags, markers, Iodine spray and fly spray is an easy “inside task” to escape the heat. As I start preparing for the upcoming season, I also create a new spreadsheet on my computer in which I will enter records. My format is very simple; I create a 6 column table that has Cow ID; Calving Date; Calf Sex; Calf ID, Calf Sire; and Birth Weight as headers. Every year, it seems that I have calve out a couple of cows who have lost their tags. A hint that I use on my farm is to tag those calves with a letter only. Then when the cow is worked, her tattoo will be read and recorded with the appropriate calf. As a fall calving, seedstock producer, I often catch myself looking at upcoming sale catalogs that feature spring calves. I look at what matings have worked in other herds and try to identify the hot young sires.

Lastly, if you haven’t weaned spring calves, it is getting time to start thinking about it. Early weaning spring calves could be profitable and necessary, especially in times that grasses are short and forage availability is becoming limited. Once the cow quits producing milk, her nutrient requirements and intake decrease significantly. Work with stockyard owners and managers to develop a plan to market spring calves most effectively.

As we wrap up summer and plan for fall, we can counter-act summer time blues by preparing for cooler temps and winter feeding, assembling needed items for fall calving systems, and weaning spring calves. Continue monitoring pastures and hay fields for army worms and Bermuda grass

stem maggots. Consider using insecticide to control flies on herds. Above all else, curb all your blues with beef on the grill!

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For more information about beef cattle production, contact an office of the Mississippi State University Extension Service or visit extension.msstate.edu.