

Five Oaks Beef

Five Oaks Family Farm Monthly Newsletter

June/2018

In this issue...

On The Farm...

Spring Bloat In Cattle...

In The Spring...

USDA Inspection...

Warren County Farmers Market...

Did You Know...



On The Farm...

We're well into June and pastures are green and growing and the weather is getting hot. First cuttings of hay are happening all over the county and those who guess right about the weather are rewarded with much better hay than those who do not. The old expression about 'making hay while the sun shines' is founded in fact. Rain during the hay making process can dramatically reduce the nutritive value which is key to the overall quality of the hay. In this area, people generally get 2 cuttings of hay each year, one in late May to early June and another in late August to early September.

The hay making process begins with mowing the field. This is always done with a sickle (cutting bar) type of mower, never a rotary (bush hog) type. The sickle mower will cut the grass and lay it down gently whereas a rotary mower will shred it which is never a good thing! The timing for every stage of the pro-

cess is weather dependent but generally around here, the grass will be allowed to dry for 2-3 days. Often during that time, the hay will be 'tedded'. A Tedder is a machine that gently turns the hay over in place, helping the drying process. When the grass has reached about a 18-20% moisture content, it is 'windrowed'. Windrowing is, as you might expect, the process raking up the hay that is spread over the field and creating those nice even rows of grass the hay baler requires.



It is not uncommon to get 6-8 4x5 bales of hay per acre.

Hay is baled in many sizes

but probably most common here is a 4x5 round bale. The 4x5 is interpreted as a round bale, 5 feet in diameter and 4 feet tall. A 4x5 bale can be expected to weigh in at between 850 and 1,000 pounds.

An 1,100 pound cow, accounting for waste and moisture content, requires about 35 pound of hay per day during the winter which means that a 4x5 bale is enough to feed 1 cow for about 25 days. As a rule of thumb, cattle in this area will be on hay for anywhere from 100 to 120 days during the winter.

A few facts about hay you might find interesting are that hay can and will spontaneously combust if baled at moisture contents at or above about 22%. With sufficient moisture, chemical processes associated with decomposition of the organic matter in the hay results in elevated temperatures and the creation of flammable gases that can combust. The internal temperature in a round hay bale can easily reach 180°!

A local farmer lost an entire hay barn, filled with hay, to this type of hay fire two years ago.



Another interesting, though far less critical, fact is that due to the geometric aspects of a cylinder (round hay bale), 60% of the total

volume of hay is contained in the outer 12 inches of the bale. Bales stored outside and exposed to the weather have that outer 12 inches of hay compromised by sunlight and rain will lose quality very quickly. Hay should always be stored under cover. And lastly, at the risk of boring you with hay facts, cattle, unlike people, inherently and instinctively know how much they must eat to maintain their health. As a result, feeding low quality or rain damaged hay results in the cattle compensating for the lower nutritive value by eating more. As a result, not only does low quality hay waste your money, it is very possible that due to increased consumption, you can actually run out of hay during the winter!

Spring Bloat In Cattle...

By this time of year, the dangers of Spring Bloat in cattle are mostly past. Bloat can occur in cattle when they are first exposed to large quantities of fresh, lush spring grasses. Their rumens (one chamber of their four chamber stomach) can't keep up with the expulsion of digestive gases and begins to expand rapidly. If not remedied quickly, sometimes in a matter of hours, the expansion of the rumen pressing into other internal organs, most notably the lungs, the animal can

die. We watch our herd very carefully in the spring for signs of bloat.

In The Spring...

Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote, "In the Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."



which, I guess comes to mind as we begin the breeding season. We have selected a registered Angus bull this year with some great EPDs and we, as well as our cows and heifers ☺ are anxiously awaiting his arrival.

An EPD, which stands for Expected Progeny Difference', is a way of scoring the relative merits of bulls and the likelihood that they will contribute positive characteristics to their progeny, or offspring. There are some 20 or 30 different EPDs (measures) that are tracked in registered Angus bulls but the most important are 'Calving Ease' which measures the likelihood that a first calf heifer will be able to deliver her calf without assistance. Another is Birth Weight which contributes to Calving Ease. The smaller the calf at birth the more easily it can be 'delivered'. Weaning Weight and Yearling Weights are also important. Not only do we want small calves at birth, we want high weaning and yearling weights which means they were born healthy and will grow rapidly. On what might be construed as a somewhat more crass and commercial note ☺, we also look at the Ribeye Area EPD which attempts to anticipate the actual size, in square inches, of the Ribeye steak that will ultimately come from a steer or heifer sired by this particular bull! I am pleased to report that the bull we have chosen has exceptional EPDs in all these areas!

The bull will be in with our 'girls' for about 3 months and they come into 'standing heat' every 28 days which will provide them with at least 3 opportunities to conceive. Cows and heifers become quite restless during heat in the presence of a bull and are quite eager for his 'attention'. In fact, in the cattle business, a cow or heifer is referred to as 'having settled' when she conceives.

USDA Inspection...

If you've been with us for awhile, you know that all our beef is 100% USDA Inspected so you can be as-

sured of the quality. We are asked frequently though by people who are thinking about purchasing our beef if we do our own processing. No, no, no! The law requires that all beef offered for sale in this country be inspected by the USDA or a state equivalent, like the NCDA.

of view and startled her, it is very likely that instinctively she would respond by kicking backwards. Kicking is one of their only two defense mechanisms. If you've not seen a startled, or angry cow kick, you really can't appreciate the power and lightning speed involved!



‘Beef You Can Trust’ is not just a marketing phrase for Five Oaks Beef, it is our commitment to you, our customers!

Warren County Farmers Market...

We know that most of you do shop at the Warrenton Farmers Market regularly during the season and we always enjoy seeing you there! For those of you who haven't been to the market, we really encourage you to stop by on Saturday mornings between 8:00 am and noon. The market is located in downtown Warrenton in the BB&T parking lot on Bragg Street. The market is small but growing rapidly and offers great local farm to table and homemade products! All products offered at the market must have been grown or hand-made here in Warren County! Come see the products and meet the dedicated people who produce them. Warren County is a great community and we are all fortunate to be able to live and work here. Come see us!

Did You Know...

Cattle have a 330° field of view which means there is only a small area, about 30°, directly behind them where you are out of their sight. They can easily see you, when you are mostly behind them, without even turning their heads. Hmm.. Now that I think about that, it kind of reminds me of my mother... ☺

A serious implication of their wide field of view is that it can be very dangerous to be directly behind a cow, calf or bull at close range. For instance, if you were standing, unseen, 5 or 6 feet directly behind a cow and you moved suddenly to your left or right into her field

Beef you can trust!