

Weaning Calves on the Ranch

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It's getting that time of year when Florida ranchers wean and market calves. Most ranchers market their calves right off the cow. Most ranchers will keep some replacement heifers, and a few producers will even keep all calves on the ranch after weaning for various reasons.

Weaning is by far the most stressful time in a calves life. It is the first time away from their mother and her milk, and for the first few days calves walk the fence, bawl, and eat very little forage or feed. Thus, their nutrition is practically zero, making them susceptible to many diseases.

Here are a few management tips to get calves on a good plane of nutrition immediately after weaning and to keep them healthy and growing.

1. Separate cows and calves quickly, with little commotion and prodding (no hot shots).
2. Place calves in a small, dry pasture or drylot, with shaded areas if possible; remember, Florida can get heavy rains during the July to October period.
3. DO NOT castrate or dehorn calves at weaning.
4. DO NOT vaccinate calves at weaning. Vaccinate 30 days or more before, or several weeks after weaning.
5. Provide calves free-choice good quality hay or pasture. Stargrass and Floralta limpograss (*hemarthria*) are superior to bahiagrass for grazing weaned calves. Stage pastures to provide young to medium maturity forage, and fertilized a few weeks before grazing.
6. Provide a high energy, dry concentrate weaning feed. Feed two to three pounds per calf the first day and increase by one to three pounds daily until calves are eating 10 to 15 pounds per day.
7. Place feed troughs and good clean water against the weaning pasture fence such that calves walk into them every time they make a round.
8. Feed calves a minimum of 28 days, and 45 days or more if possible.
9. If calves are kept over 28 days a more economical gain can be obtained with five pounds per calf per day of either dry concentrate or a molasses/natural protein slurry, and graze on good quality stargrass or Floralta limpograss pasture.

10. Continue feeding replacement heifers to be bred as yearlings at least five pounds per heifer per day of dry concentrate or molasses/natural protein slurry through the breeding season, and graze on good quality stargrass or Floralta limpogross pasture until rebred as two-year-olds.
11. Place heifers to be bred as two-year-olds on good pasture and feed dry concentrate or molasses/natural protein slurry as needed during the winter to keep them growing and healthy.

NOTE: Creep feeding nursing calves with dry concentrate will teach them to eat and they will take to feed quicker at weaning. A limited creep feeding program can be initiated three weeks before weaning to hold down feed costs.

For questions or comments regarding this publication contact



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