

Calf Value & Management: What Florida Agents Learned Visiting Texas Feedlots

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SOUTH FLORIDA BEEF FORAGE PROGRAM (SFBFP)

- South Florida county Extension agents, research faculty, and Extension specialists
- Coordinate Extension and research activities for enhanced forage and cattle production
- Our main audience is cow-calf producers



CALVES AFTER FLORIDA

- Typically weaned straight off the cow, onto the truck
 - Hard to pre-condition calves in Florida
- Not a ton of retained ownership or custom feeding – focus is selling as many pounds as possible at weaning
- Average weaning weights: 400-600 pounds
 - Not a lot of incentive in this market to grow them real heavy
- Some may go straight into the feedlot, some may go to stocker operations
 - Feedlots are buying up a lot of light weight calves because they need to fill pens
 - Margins for stocker operators are being squeezed right now – competition drives prices
- Why do we [Extension agents in a cow-calf state] care about what happens after our calves leave Florida?



2025 SFBFP EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVE

Agents need & want to learn too!!!

GOALS OF THE TRIP



Increase our knowledge about what happens after calves leave Florida



Become better equipped to help our producers & share information that we learned



Develop & strengthen relationship with buyers of Florida cattle

OKC West Auction
National Livestock & Superior



West Texas A&M
Research Feedlot



JBS Packing - Cactus, TX



Cactus Feeders - Wrangler Yard



PerryKirkland Feedyard



Five Rivers Feedyard - Hartley

QUESTIONS WE WENT TO ASK



1. Are Florida cattle desirable?
2. Are there differences between feeding FL cattle vs "local" cattle?
3. Do I have to or need to fill a load?
4. How important are health protocols (vaccinations, castrating, implants, etc.) at the cow-calf level?
5. Why does management at the cow-calf level matter?

WHAT WE LEARNED

1. Are Florida cattle desirable?

Answer: "Florida cattle are valuable and wanted."

- There are different marketing avenues for Florida producers.
 - Stocker operations – Florida calves gain well on wheat pastures in the fall
 - Direct to feedlot

- Florida producers have done an excellent job of improving genetics and built power over the years.

- "Bigger and better" calves and stronger demand for those calves
- Adapting and improving the herd increases the value of their cattle

Pairing the goals of an operation with the desires of cattle buyers is an invaluable strategy to the success of profitably marketing Florida cattle.



WHAT WE LEARNED

2. Are there differences between feeding FL cattle vs "local" cattle? Does that affect the demand for them?

Answer: "If you can get them to me, I'll gladly feed them."

- Feedlots have figured out how to feed Florida cattle well to give them the best chance possible of finishing and feeding well.
 - Calves may have to be "tableted" upon arrival.
 - Need hay for the first few days and more open space to get acclimated.
 - This does not affect the demand for them.
- Florida cattle do well in Texas compared to northern cattle.
 - The Texas penhandle climate is less harsh compared to Florida, so the cattle tend to adapt and thrive.
 - Prefer to have Florida cattle arrive by October for easier transition to winter weather.



WHAT WE LEARNED

3. Do I have to or need to fill a load?

Answer: "...I'll custom feed as few as 20 head..."

"...I'll take as few as 50 if you get them to me..."

"...Our pen size is mainly set up for full loads..."

- It depends on the feedlot.
 - Pen set up
 - Grouping of customer cattle (retained ownership)
- Marketing Strategies
 - Ensure uniformity in weight and size, hide color, and health protocols.
 - Partnering with a fellow producer to put a load together.
 - Feedlots will typically take mixed loads of calves and steers but not mixed loads of weights and sizes.
- Many feedlots offer financing options.
 - Building the relationship is the first step for both parties to benefit.
 - Feedlots want to feed your cattle and building that relationship helps to meet the goals of both producer and feedlot manager.

WHAT WE LEARNED

4. How important are health protocols (vaccinations, castrating, implants, etc.) at the cow-calf level?

• The question(s) we get a lot as Extension agents:

"I know they vaccinate, castrate, & implant them when they get there, so why should I do it on the ranch?"



VACCINATIONS



CASTRATION



IMPLANTS

WHAT WE LEARNED

• How important are...



VACCINATIONS

Answer: "Vaccination is different than immunization."

- The shot(s) calves get at the feedlot will not be as effective if that is the first time that they are receiving it.
 - stressed from traveling + weaning
 - the feedlot vaccine functions as a booster
 - recommendation: at least two rounds → Modified live vaccines (MLV) are preferred, but killed vaccines are better than none at all.
- Vaccinations are more effective if nutrition plans are solid & cattle are in a low-stress environment.
 - Solid mineral program
 - Low-stress handling
 - Proper dosage/administration
- Sick cattle get behind & don't eat well → affect show they finish & grade → affect money in packer's pocket → affect money in feedlot's pocket → affect money in producer's pocket

WHAT WE LEARNED

• How important is...



CASTRATION

Answer: In Florida, prices have historically been 5-6 percent lower for bull calves.

- Stress affects weight gain.
 - numerous research studies to show that castrating as early as possible is the best avenue & does not negatively affect weaning weights
 - there are always discounts for bull calves compared to steer calves
- If calves don't eat & gain, that is money lost for the feedlot...which affects the calf's value.
 - Bull calves receive a discount because it is known they will have to "play catch up" after being castrated at the feedyard.
 - Marketing steer calves instead of bull calves also insinuates that calf may have gone through a vaccination protocol.

WHAT WE LEARNED

• How important are...



IMPLANTS

Answer: "Implants are effective at every stage."

- More often than not, there is money being left on the table if you do not implant because of the weight gain received for a very low per head input cost.
 - It is not usually a waste of time or money to implant steer calves at the cow-calf level.
 - We sell pounds, so the more the better.

WHAT WE LEARNED

• How important are health protocols (vaccinations, castrating, implants, etc.) at the cow-calf level?

Answer: "We [feedlots] specialize in feeding cattle. We want to focus on feeding cattle efficiently [for you], not setting the map to be fed efficiently."

- There are several other general management decisions that can be implemented to improve calf performance.
 - water troughs instead of only ponds
 - bunk feeding (if possible; hard to do in Florida)
 - handling, mineral, vaccine administration
- The performance of calves & the value of their end product influences value & profitability.
 - Sick calves develop a reputation, negatively influencing their value.
 - End product examples:
 - Damaged hides from improper placement of bands, shots, horns, etc. are discounted
 - Carcass value declines when damaged meat has to be trimmed off.

WHAT WE LEARNED

5. Why does management at the cow-calf level matter?

Answer: "While there may not always be a premium for "better" calves, there are often discounts for calves that have a reputation of getting sick, under performing, and/or not delivering high-quality products."

- Management at the cow-calf level matters because the **reputation** of an operation has influence on the value of that operation's calves.
- Building **relationships** between producers & feedlots is a necessary partnership for the cattle industry as both work towards the same goal of producing high-quality beef products for consumers.

"REPUTATION & RELATIONSHIPS"

Conclusion & Outcomes

- Good management at the cow-calf level influences the value of Florida cattle and strengthens reputation.
- The SFBFP group of agents gained knowledge and insights to share with producers.
 - Marketing opportunities for smaller producers
 - How health management influences performance
 - How feedlots operate day-to-day
 - Price differences for high-risk calves
- Future Plans
 - We would like to organize a similar, producer-oriented tour in the future.
 - The ultimate goal is to help Florida cattle producers recognize what makes cattle more desirable to buyers and feedlots—and use that knowledge to capture more value at the cow-calf level.

Check Out Our Blog!



[CLICK HERE FOR THE LINK!](#)



QUESTIONS???

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Visit the SFBFP Website to find your local agent & more resources!
<https://programs.ifas.ufl.edu/sfbfp/>



Upcoming Events

Join us for our next Ona Highlight!

Tuesday, Nov. 18, 11:00 – 11:45 a.m.

'Carbon dynamics from typical pasture-based beef cattle production systems in central-south Florida'

with Dr. Rosvel Bracho, Associate Research Scientist, specializing in carbon, greenhouse gases, water, and nutrient dynamics, at the UF/IFAS Range Cattle REC, Ona.

UF/IFAS Range Cattle Research & Education Center – Ona, FL

The South Florida Beef Forage Program

Environmental Lands Management Seminar & Boat Tour Kissimmee River

For public property managers or anyone interested in learning how cattle ranching supports conservation practices.

Topics

- Florida Cattle Industry Basics
- Managing Land with Cattle: Benefits and Challenges
- From Grass to Greater Good: Ranchlands, Ecosystem Services, and BMP Solutions
- Producer Panel: Cattle, Conservation, and Stewardship
- Cattle and Land Use: Perspectives from the River (Kissimmee River Boat Tour)

\$50
Registration fee
Includes Boat tour, lunch, and educational materials

Wednesday October 15, 2025
9:00am Registration
9:30am - 2:00pm Program
First American Land & Cattle
6331 West Loxley Drive
Orlando, FL

For more information:
E. J. Jurek @ ufl.edu

To register: <https://environmental-lands.eventbrite.com>

Extension will send

UP/IFAS Extension

RANCHING FOUNDATIONS

October 23, 2025
10:00 am - 2:30 pm

Seminole Tribe of Florida
Cattle & Range
1841 Seminole Road NE
Okeechobee, FL 34974

REGISTRATION: Register with the link or scan the QR code:
<https://ranchingfoundations.eventbrite.com>

\$20 in-person vs. **\$10** online
Space is limited!

LUNCH & EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS INCLUDED

For more information, contact Tanya Crawford at tcrawford@ufl.edu

Topics include: Pasture Assessment, Pasture Nutrition, Pasture Weeds, Spread Calibration


