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FEEDING PROGRAMS FOR CALVES AT WEANING

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Many calves lose weight for several weeks after weaning due to stress and/or because no supplemental feed, or a small amount of a poor quality feed is fed. This causes a large economic loss because calves can efficiently convert feed to gain at this age. Also, heifers that will be bred as yearlings only have approximately five months before breeding, and must get off to a good start at weaning.

Many feedlots use high energy receiving rations for calves shipped from Florida. Many Florida cattle producers do not use high energy weaning feeds because they are concerned with acidosis and health related problems developing in the calves. Increased management is required with a high energy feed; self-feeders and calves must be checked daily. However, high energy feeds can be used successfully with favorable economics because high roughage and high energy weaning feeds are often sold for a similar price.

At weaning (September 6, 1989) 28 steer calves (530 pounds) were allotted to four groups of seven head each. Each group was placed on a one acre bahiagrass pasture. Pastures were not fertilized, and forage availability was limiting. Two groups each were assigned to a high roughage or a high energy feed. The high roughage feed was pelleted, and was 55 percent TDN and 12 percent protein, with some protein supplied by urea. The high energy feed was a loose mix, and was 65 percent cracked corn, 15 percent wheat midds, 10 percent roughage, and 10 percent natural protein feeds, minerals and vitamins (70 percent TDN, 12 percent protein, no urea). Both feeds cost approximately \$190.00 per ton delivered in 20 ton bulk loads. Each feed was fed in ad-libitum amounts. Initial and final (October 3) weights were obtained after an over-night shrink.

Calves fed the high roughage and high energy diets consumed approximately 2.5 percent of their body weight in feed. No sickness or acidosis problems were observed. Calves fed either diet gained well, with calves fed the high energy diet gaining .50 pounds per day more than those fed the high roughage diet. The high energy diet was more efficiently

converted to gain, resulting in a less expensive cost of gain. Cost of gain values include feed cost only, and are attractive in current calf markets.

Daily gains reported in the table are shrunk weight gains. Daily gains of 2.5 to 2.75 pounds are the most that should be expected from weaned calves fed a good quality, high energy feed. Because of gut-fill, care must be taken when evaluating weight gains covering a short period of time. Daily gains over 3.0 pounds should be examined to determine if gut-fill is involved. Generally calves do not have a lot of gut-fill at weaning, whereas gut-fill can be significant at the end of a 30 day weaning trial. This is important whether you are buying or selling cattle with respect to the amount of pencil shrink applied to cattle.

When evaluating weaning feeds, carefully examine the feed ingredients used. Urea should be avoided unless used in combination with a high by-pass protein source such as feathermeal. Wheat midds should be limited to 20-25 percent of the mixture, and cracked corn is better than ground corn.

Response of calves fed two types of weaning feed		
	High Roughage	High Energy
Feed intake, lb as-fed	12.2	12.8
Daily gain, lb	1.8	2.4
Feed/gain	6.8	5.3
Feed cost of gain, \$/lb	.64	.51