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## **Effect of Breeding Season for Cows Grazing Range and Bahiagrass Pasture**

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A four-year study at the Range Cattle REC compared a fall-winter range grazing period with spring breeding vs. a winter-spring range grazing period with summer breeding. Cows were moved from range to bahiagrass pasture March 1 for a 90-day spring breeding season, or May 15 for a 90-day summer breeding season. Calves from the spring and summer breeding seasons were weaned in late August and mid November, respectively. Cows were placed back on range after calves were weaned. Cows were supplemented with 5 lb/cow/day of molasses-based supplement for 135 days from the start of calving through the first 60 days of breeding.

Cows grazing range during the fall-winter lost 62 lb more weight and 0.3 units more body condition than cows grazing range during winter-spring. These results show that spring grazing of range is better suited for maintaining the weight and condition of lactating cows. Because cows grazing range during the winter-spring and bred during the summer lost less weight on range, it would appear that the better utilization of range resources with spring grazing would improve calf production. However, the heavier body weight and better condition of cows grazing range in the winter-spring, as compared to cows grazing range in the fall-winter, was lost during the period cows grazed bahiagrass pasture.

A problem with grazing range during the winter-spring followed by summer breeding is the time cows grazed bahiagrass pasture. Cows on range in the winter-spring and bred in the summer grazed bahiagrass forage at a later stage of maturity (May through

November) and of poorer quality than bahiagrass forage grazed by cows on range in the fall-winter and bred in the spring (March through August). This would be particularly true for bahiagrass grazed during the early fall, a time when cows on range in the winter-spring and bred in the summer were nursing heavy calves which also depended considerably on bahiagrass forage for their nutrition.

A second problem with grazing range in the winter-spring followed by summer breeding is that cows are nursing heavy calves during the wettest period of the year. For example, in 1994 the Range Cattle REC received 37 inches of rain during the August-November period. Cows grazing range in the winter-spring and bred during the summer weaned calves that were 116 lb lighter than calves nursing cows grazed on range in the fall-winter and bred during the spring.

Over all four years, calves from cows grazing range during the fall-winter and bred during the spring averaged 54 lb heavier when weaned at 230 days of age (452 vs. 398 lb) than calves from cows grazing range during the winter-spring and bred during the summer. There was no difference in cow pregnancy rates. These data strongly indicate that cows utilizing a combination of native range and bahiagrass pasture should be grazed on range during the fall-winter and bred no later than late winter or early spring on bahiagrass pasture for best feeder calf production.