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Utilizing Limpograss Pasture for Heifer Development

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Over the past four years we have developed weaned heifers on limpograss (*hemarthria*) pasture plus various energy/protein supplements, and bred them as yearlings to calve at two years of age. Heifers cycle through a five-pasture rotation, with each pasture grazed for one week and rested for four weeks. Pastures are fertilized with a N-P-K in September to provide 60 lbs N per acre, and fertilized again in early-March with only 60 lbs N per acre. Heifers are placed on limpograss pasture after weaning in October at a stocking rate of 1 heifer per acre, and bred for 60 days beginning March 1. This stocking rate was selected with the objective of feeding no hay, and over four years no hay has been fed. During the late-spring, summer and fall, excess limpograss forage accumulates, and is used during the winter and early-spring.

During the first two years, two supplementation treatments were evaluated: (a) 6 lb per head daily of molasses-urea, or (b) 6 lb per head daily of molasses-urea-feathermeal. Supplements were fed from weaning (early-October) until the end of breeding (May 1). From weaning until first-frost (mid-January) no difference in heifer daily gain was observed between the two treatments. Quality (crude protein and digestibility) of the limpograss pasture declined after frost, and heifers fed molasses-urea-feathermeal had a greater daily gain than those fed molasses-urea from frost until the end of breeding. Even with the increased daily gain by feeding feathermeal after frost, no difference in pregnancy rate was noted between the two treatments, averaging approximately 70%. Heifers calved on limpograss as two-year-olds with most heifers weighing 950 to 1000 lb. They were moved to cow herds for rebreeding to the second calf and rebreeding rates have been good.

During the first two years, supplement was fed for approximately 200 days from weaning until the end of breeding. With the excellent condition of limpograss pasture after fall fertilization, we questioned whether supplement was needed from weaning until pasture condition declined by grazing or frost.

We addressed this question over the past two years by not supplementing yearling heifers in one treatment from weaning until the first frost, followed by 6 lb per head daily of a molasses-urea-feathermeal supplement from frost until the end of breeding. This was compared to second treatment in which heifers were fed 6 lbs of the molasses-urea-feathermeal supplement from weaning until the end of breeding.

In the first year (see table), feeding supplement prior to frost appeared to substitute for pasture, and did not improve heifer weights. A slightly higher percentage of heifers fed supplement from weaning reached a target weight of 650 lb at the start of breeding. However, this heavier weight was not indicative of improved pregnancy because heifers in both supplementation treatments bred equally well, averaging 93%.

TABLE 1. Effect of feeding yearling heifers grazing limpograss pasture a molasses based supplement on liveweight gains.

Treatment	Initial weight, lb	Weight at first frost, lb	Weight at breeding, lb	% reaching target wt
Year 1				
Supplemented after frost	523	612	632	56
Supplemented from weaning	520	611	667	69
Year 2				
Supplemented after frost	543	586	630	38
Supplemented from weaning	543	620	681	88
Initial weight taken at weaning in early October; Weight at frost = weight when supplement was started for heifers supplemented after first frost (mid-January); Weight at breeding = start of the breeding season (March 1); % reaching target weight of 650 lbs at the start of the breeding season.				

We are currently in year 2 (1998-99), and preliminary results are different from those obtained in year 1. Heifers fed supplement from weaning to frost had a much higher daily gain than heifers fed no supplement. Only 38% of heifers fed no supplement from weaning to first frost reached a target weight of 650 lb at the start of breeding, compared

to 88% of heifers fed supplement starting at weaning. Currently bulls are with heifers and breeding results for 1998-99 will be forthcoming.