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Range Cows fed Molasses-Based Supplement Perform Well

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Many Florida cattlemen combine range and improved pasture in their production program. After weaning in the fall, cows are placed on range where they calve and graze throughout the winter. In the spring they are moved back to improved pasture for breeding.

Although cows make good use of range forages during the winter, those that calve usually lose body condition because of a lack of nutrition to meet the needs of lactating cows. A poorer body condition results in lower calf weaning weights and/or poorer reproduction expressed as lower pregnancy rates or delayed rebreeding.

At Ona, we evaluate supplementation programs to determine if production problems associated with utilizing range could be corrected with molasses-based supplements. In each of three years 56 pregnant mature cows were placed on range pasture in October. Cows calved during December and January. Starting around the middle of December one-half of the cows were fed five pounds/ head/day of a molasses-urea supplement (30 percent crude protein). The other cows were fed five pounds/head/day of a molasses-cottonseed meal-urea supplement (30 percent crude protein). On March 1 all cows were placed on bahiagrass pasture, fed five pounds/head/ day of a molasses-feather meal-urea supplement (20 percent crude protein), and exposed to bulls for 90 days.

Results of the study showed no difference in the pregnancy rate of cows fed either molasses-urea or molasses-cottonseed meal-urea during the range grazing period, and there was no difference in the weight of their calves at weaning. However, overall performance of all cows was very good considering they were wintered on range with a

nursing calf, and their body condition was poor when placed on bahia pasture for rebreeding. Overall pregnancy rate was 83 percent and calf weaning weight was 425 pounds at eight months of age. Most surprising was that cows that had a condition score of either two, (eight cows) or three, (40 cows) when removed from range and placed with bulls had a 90 percent pregnancy rate. Cows that had a condition score of either four, (65 cows) or five and higher, (45 cows) both had a 80 percent pregnancy rate.

In this study it could not be determined which phase of supplementation was most beneficial to obtaining good reproductive performance by cows in poor body condition. It is probable that supplementing cows while on range and during the subsequent breeding season on bahiagrass pasture with molasses containing natural protein were both important.

This supplementation program requires about 825 pounds of molasses-based supplement per cow at a cost of about \$50 for feed, (mixed on ranch) and \$10 for equipment and labor. The performance of cows and calves in this study in comparison to performance data previously obtained at Ona for lactating cows grazing range and not supplemented, (60 to 65 percent pregnancy and 300 to 350 pounds weaned calves) make this supplementation program economically sound.