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FEEDING MOLASSES SLURRY IMPROVES CALF PROFITS

by F.M. PATE
IFAS, AREC-Ona



For questions or comments regarding this publication contact

[Findlay Pate](#)

The response of weaned calves to a molasses slurry mix was tested in a cooperative feeding trial at Sun-Ag Farms, Fellsmere under the supervision of Ray Negus. Other participants were Florida Molasses Exchange, Riviera Beach; U.S. Sugar Corporation, Clewiston; and Gator Feeds Inc., Okeechobee.

Procedure

Twenty nine steer calves of mixed breeding were weaned on August 7, 1989, placed on bahiagrass pasture, and fed five lb/head/day of dry weaning feed for 29 days. Calves also had access to molasses in an open trough. From September 5 to March 14 calves were fed a molasses slurry supplement containing 90 percent molasses-urea-fat mix (12 percent crude protein with six percent as non-protein nitrogen, and five percent vegetable fat) and 10 percent dry ingredient (52 percent crude protein; with feathermeal, corn meal, wheat middlings and rice bran the major ingredients). This gave a 16 percent crude protein slurry with six percent from non-protein nitrogen. Calves were fed large, round-bale bermudagrass hay from December 21 to March 14.

On March 14, the slurry mix was changed to 80 percent heavy molasses (82 percent Brix, six percent crude protein) and 20 percent of the above dry ingredient. This gave a 15 percent all natural protein slurry mix. Hay feeding was discontinued on March 14. Slurry mixes were fed free-choice in an open trough until July 8, 1990.

Results

At weaning, calves averaged 479 pounds. During the 19 day conditioning period steers gained 28 pounds or .95 lb/head/day. This is a typical gain for calves fed five lb/ head daily of weaning feed on pasture for three to four weeks post weaning.

During the 190 day fall/winter molasses slurry feeding period (September 5 to March 14) steers averaged gaining 191 pounds or 1.01 lb/ head/day. They averaged eating 3.5 pounds of molasses slurry/head/day and four pounds of hay/head/day (December 12 to March 14). Costs for conditioning feed, molasses slurry and hay were \$13, \$48 and \$12 per head, respectively. These steers could have been sold at \$85/cwt (liveweight less three percent pencil shrink) or \$395 per head when weaned on August 7, 1989, and were valued at \$80/cwt (liveweight less three percent) or \$542 per head on March 14, 1990. The potential profit over selling at weaning (above feed costs) was \$52 per head.

During the 116 day spring/summer molasses slurry feeding period (March 14 to July 8) steers averaged gaining 195 pounds or 1.69 lb/head/ day. They averaged eating 6.0 pounds of slurry/head/day. Cost for molasses slurry was \$36 per head. The market value of the steers on July 8, 1990 was \$76/cwt (liveweight less three percent) or \$658 per head as quoted by Tommy Mann of First American Video. The profit over selling at weaning (above feed cost) was \$ 134 per steer.

These data show that Florida cattlemen have options available for marketing their calves other than selling them at weaning. The correct market must be selected and feed cost must be reasonable. The above backgrounding program of molasses slurry and pasture offer low feed costs and a potential for profit with a steady or increasing feeder calf market. Even if the feeder calf market does not appear to offer a favorable marketing picture to use this option, a molasses slurry feeding program could be used to grow replacement heifers, particularly where a yearling breeding program is followed.