

Week of Dec 26th-30th 2016

POST ROCK EXTENSION ANSWERS

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2016 is quickly coming to an end. The New Year represents a time to reflect upon your struggles and accomplishments of the past and to plan for what's ahead. For a cattle producer, there can be a lot to reflect on from the previous year, such as having to wean early from lack of pasture production or a major out-break of scours within last years' calf crop. All of these experiences lead to a great deal of thinking and planning for the up-coming year. Now is the time to evaluate your operation, and decide what changes you want to make, goals you want to set, or even keep doing something that you are currently having success with for 2017.

So what are some New Years' resolutions cattle producers can make?

Goals and management practices of operations vary, but there are some resolutions that can apply to everybody. I think it is a pretty unanimous consensus among producers that record keeping is not something we look forward to doing, but it is an absolute necessity, so strive to keep consistent production records and detailed financial records in 2017. This is critical given the current economic state of the agriculture industry. You cannot manage what you don't measure.

Another goal for the New Year could be working to reduce your feed costs by managing feed losses. This can be accomplished through feed storage methods, feeding practices or both. With feed costs representing a large portion of annual expenses for producers, this resolution seems like a no brainer. What about reevaluating your feed sources for winter feeding. Especially protein supplementation. Be sure you are pricing your protein sources on a price/lb/protein basis regularly.

Maybe improvements are needed in your pastures? Reevaluate your stocking rates for the upcoming grazing season. Make sure to get a head start on controlling thistles and other unwanted weeds this spring. Set aside time to clear invasive trees such as cedar, hedge, and honey locust. Is it necessary to conduct a prescribed burn on some of your pastures this spring? What about experimenting with rotational grazing?

Have you thought about a marketing plan for next years' calf crop? Determine what (steers, heifers, cull cows) and when (at weaning, after backgrounding) you expect to market in 2017. Evaluate your financial situation and its influence on your market options. Set target prices at what you need (break-even), want, and hope for. While you cannot control prices,

setting targets helps to determine where you are relative to the existing market at any point in time. Plan how you will monitor the market outlook. Finally, use all of this information to develop a marketing strategy.

There can be a lot of accomplishments made in one year. Identify improvements for your operation that will have the greatest impact. It is important to keep your resolutions focused and obtainable. Now is the time to consider future changes to your operation to ensure profits and fewer challenges for 2017. I hope you all have a wonderful New Year.

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Osborne, Smith, and Mitchell counties. Neil may be contacted at ncates@ksu.edu or by calling Beloit 738-3597, Lincoln 524-4432, Mankato 378-3174, Osborne 346-2521, Smith Center 282-6823. Visit our website at www.postrock.ksu.edu and follow our blog at: postrockextension.blogspot.com. Also follow us on Facebook at: Post Rock Extension.