

**Week of August 22<sup>nd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> 2016**

**POST ROCK EXTENSION ANSWERS**

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**K-State Research and Extension**

Kids are back to school, nights are cooling down and the sun is setting earlier. All signs that fall is just around the corner. It also is a sign that the time to wean your calves will soon be approaching for some or has already approached for others. Just as heading back to school can be an exciting yet stressful time for kids, weaning time can be stressful for calves. Reducing separation and managing stress, providing proper nutrition, and preconditioning against disease increases the value of the calves and improves their performance when they enter the growing and finishing period.

***Which separation method should I use?***

Separating calves from their dams causes behavioral changes that lead to stress. Vocalization, walking fences, and reduced intake can all result in reduced performance and health concerns. Producers should choose the separation method that works best for their operation. Traditional weaning is defined as separating the cows and calves abruptly without any residual contact. Calves may be moved away from the ranch, or they may be confined to a dry lot or a small pasture while the cows are taken away from the immediate area. Traditional weaning results in vocalization and fence walking which can last up to 3 days or longer.

Fenceline weaning (placing cows and calves on opposite sides of a fence) has been shown to result in fewer vocalizations, less fence walking, and more weight gain, post-weaning compared to traditional weaning of calves. Fenceline weaning works best using a tight, 4-5 strand barbwire fence, reinforced with woven wire or electric fence. However, successful fenceline weaning has been accomplished with 2 strands of electric fence. One key to successful fenceline weaning is ensuring the adjacent pastures share a fence long enough for the cows and calves to spread out and maintain relatively close physical proximity. The process takes about 5-7 days. Fenceline weaning is best accomplished by removing cows from the pasture the pairs were occupying rather than moving the calves to a new pasture because the calves are accustomed to the watering location and feeding facilities. If calves are going to be supplemented, consider supplementing the pairs three days a week beginning about three weeks prior to weaning.

Nutrition is a key element in the weight gain and immune response of weaned calves. Milk is rich in energy, protein, vitamins and minerals and needs to be replaced with high quality forage and possibly a supplement to maintain pre-weaning nutrient intake. Unlimited access to fresh, clean water is essential for weaned calves. If the post weaning water source is unfamiliar to the calves, make accommodations to familiarize the calves. Your nutrition program of course, depends on your weaning site. Native range in the fall is in a state of declining nutrient content. Weaned calves grazing native range in the fall will most likely require supplemental feed depending on the targeted weight gain. Calves moving from grazing to

dry lot for weaning must learn to eat from a bunk. Bunk space needs to be adequate (1.5-2 ft/hd) for the number of calves being weaned. Maintaining feed intake is crucial. Feeding long stem high quality grass hay the first two or three days post-weaning, works well to start calves on feed. After two or three days, begin adding some energy feeds to the diet. The diet can be delivered as a total mixed ration or the energy feed can be top-dressed on the hay. Fermented feeds such as silage should be avoided until calves are eating well, as it is not highly palatable to them. Additionally, energy is important but energy sources high in starch such as corn should be limited to 50% or less of the dietary dry matter.

Weaning is a critical time on your operation. This stage of the production cycle can either set you and the calves up for success or failure. Regardless of if you wean in August or November, use traditional or fenceline separation, or wean on grass or in a pen, have a plan in place and make sure you have the necessary accommodations.

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