

Post Rock Answers

Week of: 8/27/18 – 8/31/18

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Post Rock District – Livestock

Let the Cow Save You Money and the Bull Make You Money

No matter your business model, there are a couple of different schemes that make cow-calf producers profitable. The trick is, knowing your ranches game plan and sticking to it. Some producers are of the mindset that ugly cows wean just as heavy a calf as fancy cattle, and some producers believe that top end, typey cattle do not eat any more than ugly cattle. Whether you are a low input producers or a premium product type of producer, there are good management strategies to fit your operation and build profitability no doubt. I recently read an article from Kris Ringwall, North Dakota State Beef Specialist, that took an interesting spin on how producers could look at both sides of the equation; here is my spin-off of the article as I try to relate it back to North Central Kansas and the Post Rock District.

Ringwall openly agrees that there are a number of factors affecting profitability. While, in general, cattlemen enjoy running cows, a wider profit margin makes our smiles a little bigger and last a little longer. We have all heard the saying, “Make the cows fit the environment, never try to make the environment fit the cows.” I am a big believer in doing just that. Mother Nature is playing with a loaded deck and we simply won’t get around that. Consider moderately supplementing protein to encourage cattle to get out and graze more efficiently on those dead or mature forages. Even still, be leery of supplementing too often or too heavily as it will change the dynamic of the rumen and prevent cattle from going out and earning their keep on pasture. We have the luxury of grazing stalks heavily across most of the Post Rock District, once we make it to stalks, it’s found that on average the first 30 days on each field will provide enough crude protein that we can get by without additional supplements. At the same token, we can garner enough energy from corn or milo stalks to last about 60 days on any given field, depending on residue.

How else can we manage the cow herd to be more efficient? Some of you may scoff at this, but there is value to moderating mature size. While I will try to stay off my soap box, I do think we need to remain focused on pounds weaned per acre, not pounds weaned as a percentage of cow weight. Yes, those 1,150 pound females are going to wean a lighter calf than their 1,400 pound counterparts; however, by reducing stocking rate over time and increasing cow numbers on the same ground we can still capture more dollars.

So where does sire selection come into play? First and foremost, it comes back to the fact that we have to have an in depth understanding of our own end game. Some producers are strictly retained ownership operators that capture additional value from high quality carcasses. While this is a legitimate model, I urge you to increase understanding of maternal traits and keep a close eye on your cow herd and cull rates. Others may focus on developing their own replacements and sending steers to town post weaning or even off the cow. With a big end of

their income coming from weaning weights, it is easy for those producers to let mature size go by the wayside and lose track of their number one goal. In short, I think both of those business plans can benefit from remaining fairly neutral in bull selection. Single trait selecting is a classic example of having too much of a good thing and can ultimately weaken the backbone of the operation we may be building. Ringwall states that we, as commercial cattlemen, should become comfortable with a bull battery that ranks between the upper 30th and 50th percentile within their breed and within our desired traits.

For more discussion on how to increase cow herd efficiency or on bull utilization, feel free to stop by and see me in Mankato or give me call any time. Better yet, give me a shout any given morning if you have an extra seat in the pick up or side by side, I'd love to come take a more in depth look at your operation and visit about what you have found to be successful within your own cow herd.

Feeder Calf & Stocker Management Meeting

Join us at Mankato Livestock's new facility to discuss best management practices for receiving and weaning calves this fall. From limit feeding and nutrition to health protocol, K-State Research & Extension Specialist Dale Blasi along with Veterinarians Tim Parks and Stephen Russell will discuss how to protect your bottom line when taking in feeder cattle this fall. The meeting will be held on September 11th at 6:30 p.m. and is sponsored by Merck Animal Health and Mankato Livestock. Contact any Post Rock Extension office or email Barrett8@ksu.edu for more further details.

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Barrett may be contacted at Barrett8@ksu.edu or by calling Smith Center, 282-6823, Beloit 738-3597, Lincoln 524-4432, Mankato 378-3174, or Osborne 346-2521. Join us on Facebook at "Post Rock Extension" along with our blog site at postrockextension.blogspot.com. Follow us on Twitter @KSRE_PostRock. Also remember our website is postrock.ksu.edu