



**No Stress Weaning**  
By: Beef Today

Harvest time is weaning time for most cow-calf producers. And with the silage choppers humming through the fields and the trucks and tractors roaring down the roads, some or most Beef producers begin the stressful season of calf weaning. Don't forget his can be a stressful time for the momma cows too. Probably the most critical weaning decisions a rancher or farmer needs to make are gauging when and where to wean. USDA's National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) reports that the average weaning age of beef calves in the U.S. is a little over seven months of age. Over three-quarters of these producers reported weaning calves between 5½ - 8½ months of age.

The interesting part of the NAHMS survey is that producers reported a lack of flexibility in selection of weaning time. Relatively few ranchers indicated that cow condition, forage availability or market price drove the decision of when to wean calves. The objective of a weaning program should be to get the calves separated from their mothers and on their own as stress-free & efficiently as possible. This should be when lactation declines and calf gain begins to decrease. Diets for weaned calves can be purchased or farm produced such as dry hay, haylage or baleage. The best option is obviously to produce your own stored forages that way all your cattle will get a constant diet throughout the year. We produce 4X5 dry round bales and small square bales from fields that are planted with the same forages that our Beefalo cattle graze on in our rotational paddocks during the grazing months of the season. Luckily mild temperatures and beneficial moisture has graced our pastures and hay fields this season and we haven't suffered a killing frost that would have shut-down legume and grass production yet. If the forecast holds true to what it is currently stating, we should be able to continue grazing well into mid-October. That will be a welcomed blessing because we won't need to feed our hay until that time, and the longer they (the calves and Momma's), can graze green grass the better!

**Some important considerations in weaning management include:**

**Dust** - Dust causes severe irritation to the respiratory tract. If for some reason you've decided to keep calves in pen's, please sprinkle the pens with water to keep dust down when using wood shavings. The same is especially advisable in pig pens. Wheat straw is a better bet, but if shavings are all you have, be sure to keep the pen's dust-free! This time of the year, when the over-night temperatures are in the upper 30's and the afternoon temperatures are in the mid 70's is when pastured pigs are most susceptible to pneumonia, dust from shaving or even dry feed could instigate pneumonia. We like to add water to our piglet rations to make a wet "mash" of their corn & oat chop. So it has a thick oatmeal like consistency. Not SLOP!! It makes it much more palatable for the young piglets and helps wean them from their mothers before the Sow's look like a skinny rail by week 6.

Sorry, I got a little off track with the pigs. Let's get back to things to look out for in your weaning calves.

**Bawling** - This is another irritant to the upper respiratory tract. Not to mention your neighbors or weekend house guests. To minimize bawling - unless "fence-line weaning" - separate the calves from the cows so they can't hear each other. A good start would be to keep them out of site. Either over the hill (if you have any), or on the other side of the barn. Or better yet, if you have the option, on another farm. Some producers are fortunate to have multiple facilities/farm locations.

**Dehydration** - Some calves are not acquainted with water troughs and are so busy bawling they don't take time to find the water and drink. Use of a water source similar to one they may have been around may help. We've seen producers that use nipple waterers that are primarily utilized in pig production with the end of a nipple from a calf bottle secured over the end. Place a water trough directly under the nipple and they'll learn how to drink out of the trough by experimentation!

**Feed change** - A change in diet (from *momma to strictly grass/hay/pasture*), requires the growth of different organisms in the rumen to digest the forage. This change can take up to two weeks. This is obviously only for producers that separate the calves from the heifers/cows such as in a dairy setting. We don't separate our calves because that is what has worked best for us and our Beefalo cattle. We allow the calves (steers or heifers), to naturally wean themselves from the udder to the pasture. In doing so, we relieve any weaning stress on the calf.

Why is stress the most important challenge to overcome when weaning calves? Because stress causes the release of the hormone cortisol - a catabolic steroid that has negative effects on the immune system. This not only makes a calf more susceptible to respiratory disease, but decreases the calf's ability to respond to a vaccine. Because of this, it's important to get the first dose of vaccine into the calves while they're still nursing, when stress levels are low. There are two major groups of vaccines that should be considered to assist weaning - those for clostridial diseases and those for BRD. If you're unsure which vaccines to use, contact your veterinarian.

**Weaning strategies**

There are about as many weaning strategies as there are ranchers. Over the past 10-15 years, the beef industry has become more aware of the value of pre- and post-weaning calf health management and marketing management. It's worthwhile to explore the various weaning programs and regimes available.

One concept that's been getting a lot of attention is **fence-line weaning**, which allows cows and calves to have several days of fence-line contact, but calves are unable to nurse through the fence. This requires adequate facilities to allow for feeding and watering the calves, and **the fence must be tight enough to prevent the calf from getting back in with the heifer/cow.**

Early weaning is a management practice sometimes used during drought conditions like what The South West has been experiencing this season, or when forage quantity is less than desirable. Early weaning is often used to improve cow condition for rebreeding, particularly when forage is limiting. Research shows mixed results on the economics of early weaning.

Extended weaning may make sense in times when feed costs are high and when grazing forages aren't a limiting factor. A Florida study shows that fall-calving cows can nurse calves for up to two months beyond a standard weaning age of 7-8 months and significantly increase calf weaning weight without affecting cow reproduction.



**Introducing Our New Judges**

**Seth Ebert:** Jeromesville, OH  
**Darren Clouse:** Sheridan, IN (Not Pictured)

**Special Thanks To This Months New Newsletter Subscribers**

5 New Subscribers for the Month:



**Featured Livestock Judging Team**

Lake Land College  
(2013 National Barrow Show Junior College High Team)



**Feeder Cattle Prices Set Record Highs, Calf Prices a Runaway**

By: Greg Henderson, Beef Today Editorial Director

The rally continues for feeder cattle prices as new all-time highs were posted last week. The CME Feeder Cattle Index on Tuesday (based on a seven-day moving weighted average of 650-849 – pound Federal-State reported feeder steer sales throughout the high-producing central twelve-state area) broke the previous record of \$157.44 per hundredweight posted the last week of February 2012. The index continued marching higher the remainder of the week, closing Friday at \$159.36.

A bullish *Cattle on Feed* report the previous week spurred optimism among cattlemen, and they proceeded to bid up every class of cattle offered for sale. Last week's auction markets saw feeder cattle trading firm to \$3 per hundredweight higher, and calf markets were steady to \$5 higher. Select markets in the Central Plains reported calf markets in a runaway with prices \$10 to \$20 per hundredweight higher.

"These prices are absolutely unprecedented and aided by declining numbers of true yearlings and outstanding demand, especially north of I-70 where corn producing farmer-feeders have been active participants," says USDA Market News reporter Corbett Wall. "Calf prices continue to benefit from the trickle-down market support and sold steady to \$5 higher this week with the Southeast turning positive after trading lower in recent weeks."

Wall says calf buyers are aggressively pursuing light cattle in an effort to keep per-head costs down and maximize their options. He reported a 105-head string of fancy 400-pound steers fetched \$224 per hundredweight at last Wednesday's Torrington, WY, Livestock Commission. Wall said many Midwestern lightweights "easily surpassed the \$2 per pound mark without raising too many eyebrows in the sale barns."

The most unbelievable aspect of the current market, however, is that calf prices actually seem reasonable when one studies current feeder cattle prices. A load of 900-pound steers sold last Thursday in Valentine, NE, for \$163.50 per hundredweight, a tidy sum of \$1,471.50 per head. USDA reported more than 250 head in the top-quality 750-800 – pound range at Valentine averaged 767 pounds and traded at \$181 per hundredweight.

"It's plain that cattle feeders are starting to turn a meager profit on a few of their better performing pens of cattle they were able to get bought worth the money," Wall says. "By Friday afternoon Southern feedyards were passing on \$2 per hundredweight higher bids of \$126 as the entire cattle complex seems to be headed in the right direction."

Cattle feeders start this week asking higher money as last week's cash sales at \$126 are still \$2 discount to the spot October contract. Boxed beef prices are expected to rise seasonally as improved beef demand increases with cooler weather and smaller supplies.



**Featured Sept. 2013 Angus Bulls**

Official Placing: 3-2-1-4  
Cuts: 2-3-4

For more information on the September 2013 Angus Bulls Class of the month, visit our home page. Each month The Judging Connection.com features a class of the month and a judge from our directory. The public is allowed to vote on the class of the month. The official results of the class is determined from the featured judge of the month.



**Featured September Judge**

**Brandon Bratcher**  
Elizabeth, IN.

Brandon judges cattle.

Brandon was a member of the Purdue University livestock judging team. Along with showing and judging in college, Brandon worked at Purdue's beef research farm. During his college career he developed a passion for breeding structurally sound and economically efficient cattle. Today Brandon is actively involved in the NCBA, YPC (Young Producer's Council, NCBA), American Angus Association, local/state cattle associations, church and community services.



**Featured Livestock Judging Individual**

Jordan Fliederjohann  
(Lake Land College)