Managing for the marketing of fall-born calves

Most folks in the beef cattle industry are currently focused on marketing spring-born calves and what those calves are worth. While recognizing the importance of fall marketing, University of Tennessee Extension cattle marketing specialist Andrew Griffith reminds producers that now is the time to focus on management practices that can increase calf value when fall-born calves go to market next spring or summer.

“Castrating and implanting of bull calves are well documented to improve calf value,” said Griffith. “Implanting suckling calves has been found to add as much as 20 pounds of gain to calves. Given current prices, that could easily result in an additional $15 to $30 per head.” The expert adds that if a producer plans to retain heifers, it might be best to forgo implanting them. Similarly, Griffith says steer prices relative to same weight bull calves are generally higher. “The price spread between same weight steers and bulls changes throughout the season. Generally, the younger the animals, the smaller the spread; and the spread in the spring is generally more narrow than it is in the fall.”

Taking the process a step further, Griffith recommends that producers start deciding on marketing alternatives. “We have many livestock auctions across the state that will receive cattle every week. However, there may be some marketing opportunities that could result in higher returns. Such opportunities include graded sales, marketing alliances and video sales if the producer can fill a truck load lot,” he said. Graded sales, marketing alliances and video sales would be considered value added methods of marketing. For a producer to capture additional value, additional management is generally necessary. “This additional value usually includes weaning cattle for a minimum of 45 days and a health program including deworming and vaccinating for blackleg and respiratory diseases, among other practices.

Griffith also thinks this may also be a year in which producers could benefit from back grounding calves and marketing them at heavier weights. “Back grounding calves means the producer would retain ownership of the calves for a 45-day weaning period. Retaining ownership for an additional 45 days or so after the 45-day weaning period allows producers to continue to grow the calves with the expectation of capturing a larger profit than if sold after the 45-day weaning period,” he said.

For more tips about cattle management, visit the UT Extension publications website https://utextension.tennessee.edu/publications or contact your local county UT Extension office.

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