

## Supplementing Stockers for Acceptable Weight Gain

Some basic principles in backgrounding beef calves are:

- the addition of 200-400 pounds of gain per head,
- extensive and intensive use of high quality forage rather than the more expensive high-energy feed sources,
- assembly of calves into marketable groups - uniformity by breeding, sex, weight, etc., and
- more market flexibility.

In brief, stockers should be handled to take advantage of mistakes that exist for any reason with lightweight calves.

Every farm has different cropping systems, feed supply, labor, and management ability. However, if overwintering lightweight calves is to be profitable, sufficient daily gains must be met. Cheap cattle and low daily gains will not turn a profit. Buying low and selling high is the exception, not the rule.

Many different rations can be used successfully across the Carolinas. This leaflet will discuss three types of basic wintering systems—silage, grazing winter small grains (rye, wheat) or rye grass, and hay—and how to supplement each for acceptable weight gains.

### SYSTEM I

Corn silage is an excellent feed source for stockers and one in which daily weight gains are most predictable, provided the silage is properly supplemented. The data available today overrules the old theory that calves should weigh more than 450 pounds before they can utilize silage to yield acceptable gains.

Calves will consume approximately 5-6 percent of their body weight in silage daily. For example, a 400-pound calf will consume 20-24 pounds of silage daily. For a desired weight gain of 2 pounds per head per day, this 20-24 pounds of silage must be supplemented with 1 percent of their body weight in grain, or 4 pounds of corn plus

1.25 pounds of 40 percent protein supplement (SBOM) per head daily. Silage and corn can be increased as body weights change.

### SYSTEM II

The fall seeding of small grain (rye, wheat) or rye grass should be used frequently in the Carolinas (Piedmont and Coastal regions). Clovers could be planted with these cover crops for improved gain. Small grains are highly digestible and high in protein; therefore, lightweight calves do well on this feed source. On productive, well-fertilized land, the stocking rate can be two or three calves per acre. A grain supplement of 3-4 pounds per head per day will help ensure a gain of 1.5-1.75 pounds per head per day. No additional protein supplement is necessary. If extreme wet weather or extra cold days limit grazing, additional grain, hay, or even protein should be used.

### SYSTEM III

Some producers wish to use farm-produced hay along with gleanings, grains, and limited winter cover crops. These combinations of feeds can be used; however, it is difficult to know how they should be supplemented without knowing the amount and quality of these by-products. In general, supplement the roughages with 1 percent of the animal's body weight in grain (a 400-pound calf would need 4 pounds of corn daily) and 1.25 pounds of protein (SBOM) daily.

With each feeding system, a general mineral mix should be fed free choice along with plain salt. A mineral mix one might use is two parts dicalcium phosphate and one part trace mineralized salt. Plain salt should be fed in a separate container.

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