

Spring Calf Management Tips

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Texas is one of the few states that can go from the dead of winter to the beginning of summer in five days. Fortunately, the calves that are coming now in pastures throughout the bottom half of Texas will be the prime beneficiary of the better weather as will the green that is beginning to appear in pastures from the Sabine to the Rio Grande. Now is the time to consider a few economically beneficial few calf management tips.

First, when possible, your calves should be identified. A good ear tag will help you remember the birthdate and dam of the calf, and later at weaning and marketing, his growth rate and market value. Calves born early in the season weigh more at weaning (about 2-2.5 lbs. more per day of age) and calves that are born earlier are generally out of more adapted (and fertile) cows. Calf weight at weaning and marketing will assist you in deciding which cows are more productive and produce more valuable calves.

Second, as soon after birth as possible, castrate bull calves that you are not intending to raise and dehorn all calves. Doing these practices at a very young age reduces the pain of the procedure and increases the speed of recovery. Castrated calves are more desired by the feeding industry and they bring more dollars per pound when marketed as their carcasses will quality grade higher and be more valuable. The downside to castration is the steer calves will weigh less at weaning than bull calves but using a calf growth implant when castrating will offset the loss of gain. Dehorning or disbudding will improve the appearance and uniformity of the calves and reduce the potential for injury to you and other animals. If genetically homozygous polled bulls or cows are used, dehorning will not be necessary.

Finally, vaccinate your calves for the Blackleg or Clostridial diseases, especially if their dams have not been vaccinated and the calves are over a month old. This vaccination will protect calves from these “sudden death” diseases. All the commercial vaccines provide excellent immunity from these diseases and all calves should be vaccinated and boosted according to the label.