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Weaning Age and Management Systems For Fall Born Beef Calves

William McCone

Twenty-five registered Angus, Hereford and Shorthorn cows calved in September, 1971. The cows calved on pasture and remained on pasture until early November. From November 12 to December 29, the cows were bred for 1972 fall calves. On December 29, 1971, one-half of the calves were weaned and started on a self-fed ration. The remaining one-half of the calves were allowed to continue nursing the cows, but the calves also had access to a calf creep feeder containing the same ration used for the weaned calves. At the start of the experiment the calves were randomly divided by sex, breed and age. At this time, December 29, 1971, the average age of all calves was 114 days and they averaged 257 lb. in weight.

The fall born calves that were weaned on December 29 made an average per head daily gain of 2.09 lb. over a 91-day period. This daily gain was only slightly higher than the daily gain of 1.98 lb. made by calves which remained nursing the cows. After adjustment to a 205 day calf age, the calves weaned early weighed 444 lb. and the calves nursing weighed 440 lb. One of the objectives of this trial was to obtain data which may indicate the more desirable management practice. That is, is it better to wean a fall born calf early and develop the calf on a creep feed or is it better to let the calf nurse the cow and offer the cow the additional feed required for a lactating cow? After compensating for the small difference in calf gains, the winter cost of creep feeding an early weaned calf and hay for the dry cow was \$47.18. The total feed cost per nursing cow and her calf over the same period was \$42.16.

This is a progress report covering only the fall and winter of 1971-72. Additional trials will be conducted for more data on the subject of weaning age and management systems for fall born beef calves.

The diet used and self-fed to all calves of both groups was as follows:

	<u>Pounds</u>
Cracked shelled corn	700
Rolled oats	450
Wheat bran	200
32% protein pellets	250
Chopped brome-alfalfa hay	<u>400</u>
Total mixture	2,000

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Prepared for the Sixteenth Annual Cattle Feeders Day, October 27, 1972.

Table 1. Weaning Age and Management Systems for Fall Born Beef Calves  
(1971-72)

	Calves nursing cows	Calves weaned
<u>Calf data</u>		
Lot number	1	2
No. calves (5 bulls + 8 heifers in lot 1) (4 bulls + 8 heifers in lot 2)	13	12
Age in days at start	111	117
Days on trial (Dec. 29 to March 29)	91	91
Age in days at finish	202	208
Avg. initial weight, lb.	254	260
Avg. final weight, lb.	434	450
Avg. total gain, lb.	180	190
Avg. daily gain, lb.	1.98	2.09
Avg. daily feed, lb.	5.70	13.59
Creep feed per cwt. gain, lb.	288.25	650.65
Creep feed cost per cwt. calf gain, \$	6.92	15.62
Creep feed cost per calf, \$	12.46	29.68
	<u>Cows nursing calves</u>	<u>Dry cows</u>
<u>Cow data</u>		
Number of cows	13	12
Avg. age of cows (years)	6.5	5.9
Avg. initial weight, lb.	944	923
Avg. final weight, lb.	1001	970
Weight gain per head, lb.	57	47
Avg. daily feed, lb.		
Brome-alfalfa hay	17.9	19.2
Corn silage	24.6	none
Feed cost per cow for 91 days, \$	25.20	17.50

Feed prices: Brome-alfalfa hay, \$20.00 per ton; corn silage, \$8.00 per ton;  
creep feed, \$2.40 per cwt.