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EC62-208 Creep Feeding Beef Calves

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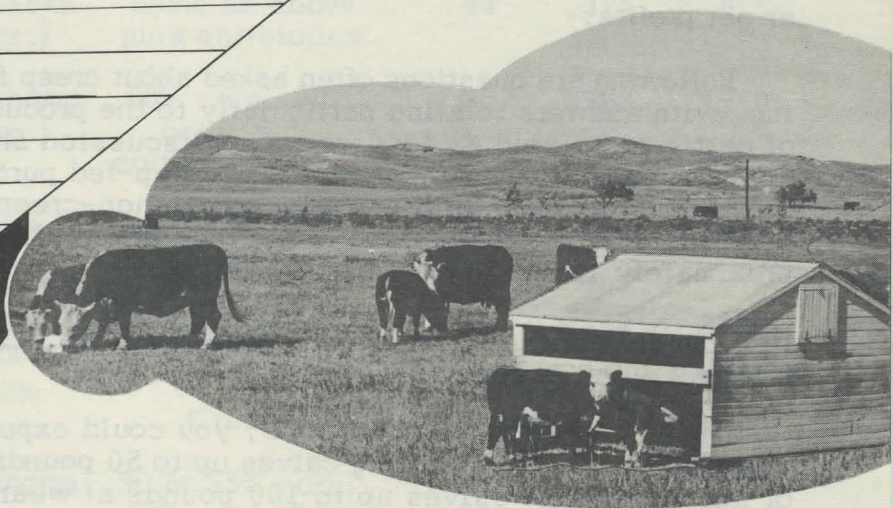
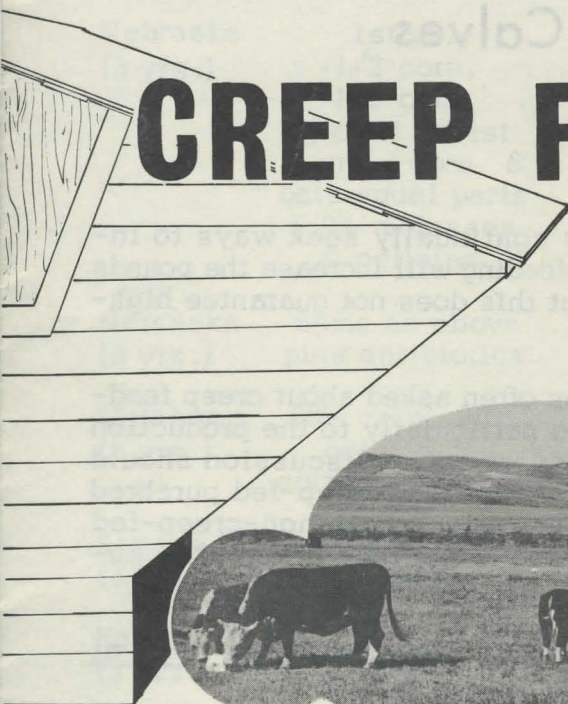
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CREEP FEEDING

BEEF CALVES



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CREEP FEEDING

Beef Calves

Beef cattle producers continually seek ways to increase net profits. Creep feeding will increase the pounds of beef sold each year, but this does not guarantee higher net profits.

Following are questions often asked about creep feeding, with answers relating particularly to the production of cattle to be sold as feeders. The discussion should apply to purebred herds, except that creep-fed purebred calves may command higher prices than non-creep-fed purebred calves, particularly when they are sold at approximately 12 months of age or younger.

How much heavier can I expect creep fed calves to be at weaning and how much feed will it take?

Under normal range conditions, you could expect to increase the weight of spring calves up to 50 pounds and of fall and winter calves up to 100 pounds at weaning. The extra gain over the non-creep-fed calves would normally require 8 or more pounds of feed for each additional pound of gain, according to available research. Results of creep feeding research from three range states are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Creep Feeding Experiments On Range

Experiment Station	Ration fed	Extra gain* over non-creep-fed calves (lbs.)	Feed consumed (lbs.)	Feed per lb. of extra gain (lbs.)
Creep-Fed Spring Calves				
Nebraska (3 yrs.)	1st yr., 1/2 corn, 1/2 oats, ground. Last 2 yrs. corn & oats equal parts + 9% molasses & pelleted	49	382	7.8
Nebraska (3 yrs.)	Same as above plus antibiotics	44	374	8.5
Oklahoma (3 yrs.)	60% corn, 30% oats, 10% cottonseed meal	30	363	12.0
Kansas (3 yrs.)	80% milo, 20% cottonseed meal	23	375	15.0
Kansas (3 yrs.)	milo	16	368	23.0
Creep-Fed Fall Calves				
Oklahoma (4 yrs.)	50 or 55% corn, 30% oats, 5 or 10% molasses	87	884	10.2
Kansas (4 yrs.)	milo	47	987	21.0

* At weaning

In addition to the variations shown in these summaries of 3 and 4 years data, considerable variation occurred between years in each state.

Where milk production is low, greater gains may occur and less feed may be required per unit of gain than shown in Table 1. An example is shown in Table 2. In this case, the data were obtained on calves out of two-year-old heifers during a dry summer season.

Table 2. Creep Feeding Spring Calves From Two-Year-Old Heifers During A Dry Year (1954)

Experiment Station	Ration fed	Extra gain* over non-creep-fed calves (lbs.)	Feed consumed (lbs.)	Feed per lb. of extra gain (lbs.)
Oklahoma (1 yr.)	corn 50%, oats 30%, cottonseed meal 10%, molasses 10%	108	740	6.9

While data are not available under all conditions that would cause low milk production, you could expect creep feeding to give greatest returns under one or more of the following conditions:

- (1) When calves are out of first calf heifers (particularly two-year-olds).
- (2) When calves are out of old cows past their peak production.
- (3) During drought years, on over-grazed ranges, or when pasture is low in quality.

Creep feeding calves out of heifers, or poor-milking, or old cows should make them fit more uniformly at weaning with non-creep-fed calves from the rest of the herd.

What effect will creep feeding have on sale prices?

In most years creep-fed calves will sell for the same price or slightly lower per hundredweight than calves that have not been creep fed. Exceptions to this are most likely to occur during drought years and in calves out of first-calf heifers.

A few creep-fed calves from "reputation" herds have sold each year at higher prices than non-creep-fed calves of comparable grade and breeding, but the demand for these is usually limited. There has been some demand the last few years for calves already started on feed. If this demand grows enough to increase the sale price, creep feeding the last 4 to 6 weeks before delivery may be desirable.

Will creep feeding affect cow weights?

In some of the creep feeding studies, cows whose calves were creep-fed gained more than mothers whose calves were not creep-fed. In a greater number of tests, gains of mothers of creep-fed and non-creep-fed calves were practically the same. Even if heavier cow weights could usually be expected as a result of creep feeding their calves, these heavier weights add little value except for those cows sold shortly after their calves are weaned.

Is creep feeding profitable . . .

A. when calves are sold as feeders at weaning?

In most tests, creep feeding has not increased net profits when calves were sold as feeders at weaning age. You can figure profit prospects by using the figures for (1) either the most favorable or the average of results for weights and feed requirements reported in Tables 1 and 2, (2) cost of feed (include an allowance for labor and equipment costs in providing the feed), and (3) the anticipated increase or decrease in selling price compared to calves not creep-fed.

Low feed prices and high feeder calf prices would appear to offer the best combination for increased net profits from creep feeding. Yet, when this combination occurs, cattle feeders are more likely to discriminate against creep-fed calves.

B. when yearling feeders are sold?

The chance that creep feeding will increase net profits is less when yearling feeders are sold than when feeder calves are sold. Non-creep-fed calves will make more rapid and efficient gains following weaning than the creep-fed calves.

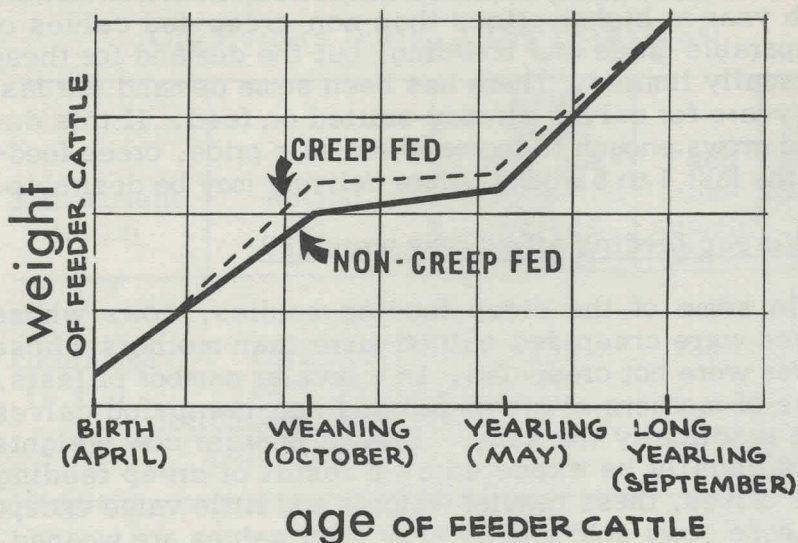


Figure 1. Creep-fed calves lose most of their advantage in weaning weight by the time they are yearlings.

Creep-fed calves may wean easier, i.e., adjust to new conditions more quickly and have less disease. Yet, management practices that achieve similar results should be evaluated before creep feeding is adopted for this reason only.

C. for replacement heifers?

Non-creep-fed heifers usually catch up with creep-fed calves before they drop their first calves. If grain feeding is needed for heifers to calve as two-year-olds, grain will be used to greater advantage if fed during their first and second winter than for creep feeding.

What are some suitable rations for creep feeding?

One of the problems in creep feeding is getting the calves started on feed (2 to 3 months of age). A mixture of whole oats and wheat bran appears to be among the best for feeding at this time. These feeds are well liked, bulky, and the bran will stick to the muzzles of the calves as they investigate the creep feeder.

After the calves get started on feed, the creep ration can be fairly simple. Several satisfactory mixtures are shown in Tables 1 and 2. Grains grown in your area will normally make a satisfactory ration. In areas where urinary calculi (water belly) is a problem, corn may be more satisfactory than milo because milo may be more likely to cause calculi formation.

Corn may be fed whole or cracked. Oats may be fed whole or rolled. Milo, rye, or barley should be rolled or ground. Complete pelleted rations may be justified if you buy all the ingredients, have pelleting facilities near you, and do not have your own grinding or rolling facilities.

Molasses will normally increase the palatability of ground and mixed rations if flies do not become a problem. If used, limit the amount to 10% or less of the creep ration.

During a normal season where cows milk well, protein supplement should not be needed for spring calves. Where milk production is low (due to drought, young or old cows, fall calves) replace 5 to 10% of the grain with an equal amount of protein supplement (40% protein or equivalent).

How much creep feeder space will I need?

Normally, 3 to 4 inches of creep feeder space per calf is enough. Where ranges are large and calves spend less time near the creep feeders, more space may be needed for maximum gains.

Where is the best place to put the creep?

For summer feeding, locate creep feeders near water, shade or salt, i.e., where cows and calves tend to loaf.

In winter, select sites that provide protection for the calves. In large pastures or ranges, one feeder should be placed at each loafing area or protected site where the cows and calves often congregate.

What type of feeder should I use?

Self feeders surrounded by a fence that will let the calves in but keep the cows out is satisfactory for permanent or semi-permanent installations. Where this installation is used, the fence should be at least 10 feet from the feeder on all sides. The fence should contain several openings about 18 inches wide and 3 feet high for the calves to enter (calves up to 600 pounds can get through).

Where creep feeders should be moved for proper range management, a portable feeder with creep stalls on each side may be better.

Plans for suitable self or creep feeders can be found in Midwest Plan Service publications available at your County Extension Office.

SUMMARY

Net profits from creep feeding depend largely on its effect on sale price of the calves per hundredweight at weaning. Increases in feeder calf prices resulting from creep feeding appear most likely to occur when milk production of the cow is low. Cow weights are not affected greatly by creep feeding.