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Aug. 3 symposium in Billings focuses on drought

Drought conditions are challenging for cattle producers trying to help their calves move from mother's milk to feed, but producers who do a good job should benefit from the record high prices expected this fall for feeder calves.

To talk about drought management options and ways to background calves during drought, Extension Services in Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota and South Dakota have organized symposiums in Billings and Rapid City, S.D. Participants will also receive updates on the status of a national animal identification program.

The symposiums titled "Backgrounding Calves: Options Under Drought Conditions" will be held Aug. 3 at the Holiday Inn in Billings and Aug. 5 at the Ramkota Inn in Rapid City. Anyone can attend. The cost is \$35 per symposium for those who register by July 29 and \$45 after that. Registration covers lunch, break and dinner.

The schedule for the Billings conference is:

10 a.m.—Registration.

11 a.m.—"National Animal ID. Where do We Stand?" by Valerie Ragan of the USDA-APHIS program.

Noon—lunch.

12:45 p.m.—"Update on Drought," by Lt. Gov. Karl Ohs, chairman of the Montana Drought Advisory Committee.

1 to 3 p.m.—Breakout sessions on drought issues. Participants attend two out of the four sessions offered. Topics are economic considerations; grazing and drought; water quality issues; and backgrounding systems.

3:30 p.m.—Breakout sessions on backgrounding. Participants attend two out of three sessions. Topics are ethanol byproduct usage and feeding; backgrounding systems; and health programs for weaned calves.

6 p.m.—Buffet

6:35 p.m.—Keynote speech by U.S. Sen. Conrad Burns, R-Mont. Panel discussion by backgrounding experts from Montana, Wyoming & Nebraska.



John Paterson,
MSU Extension beef specialist

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Animal Identification System Update

by Lisa Duffey, Montana Beef Network Coordinator

NAIS update

USDA continues to move forward with its plan to implement a National Animal Identification System (NAIS). Recently, USDA-Animal Plant Health Inspection Service selected the Wisconsin Livestock Identification Consortium (WLIC) system as its interim NAIS Standardized Premises Registration System and Premises Information Repository. USDA APHIS has also requested proposals for cooperative agreements from across the country that would evaluate the policies and procedures for state premise identification systems and implementation of a national animal identification program. Proposals were due to USDA-APHIS on July 15, 2004 and will be selected by August 15, 2004. The Montana Department of Livestock, in cooperation with the Montana Beef Network, Montana Sheep Institute, Montana Stockgrowers Association, and Montana Woolgrowers Association, has submitted a proposal to review premise and animal identification in Montana.

USDA will be hosting a listening session on NAIS in Billings on August 13. More information about this meeting and the NAIS in general can be found at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/issues/nais/nais.html>.

MBN 2003-2004

52 producers participated in the Montana Beef Network in 2003-2004 enrolling more than 16,000 calves and cows. The graph below shows the distribution of weaning weights for the calves which this information was collected.

MBN staff have gathered approximately two-thirds of the carcass data available and have been sending out reports to producers as the data becomes available. Final reports will be sent out once we are sure all the data collected has been received and entered into the eMerge database

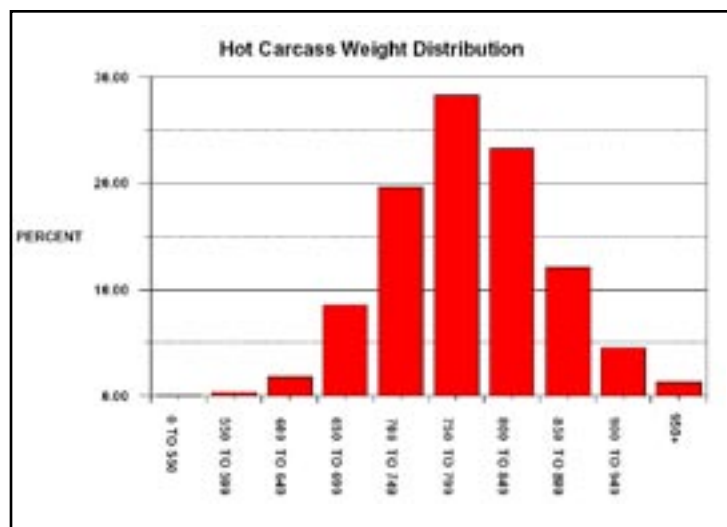
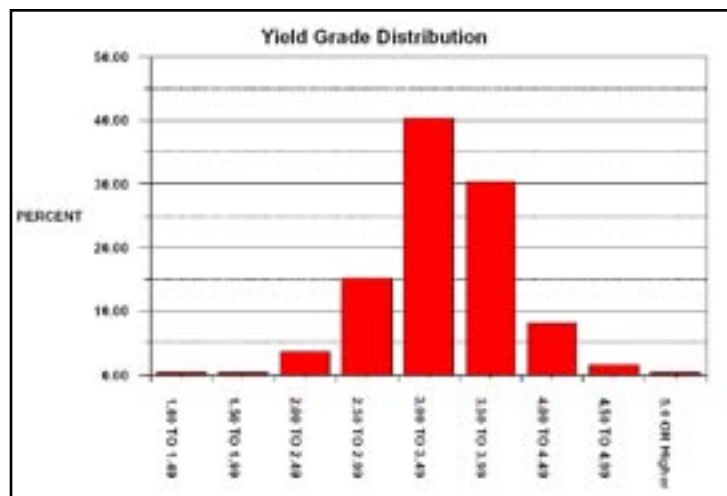
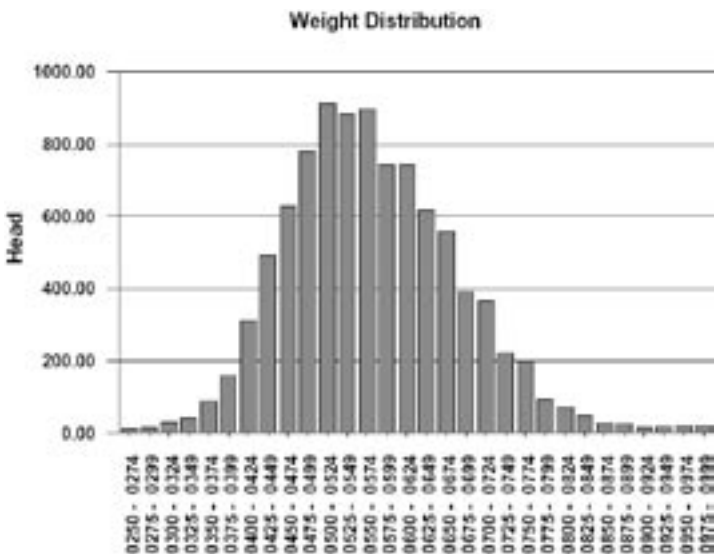
correctly. The charts below and at right indicate the average carcass data values as of July 12, 2004. Explanations of the various aspects of the carcass data measurement may be found in the article titled "Reading a Carcass Data Report: What does it mean?" by Brian Rainey (p. 6).

The reports on the eMerge website will be changing in the next month or so and will allow for more user-defined reports. If you have problems or questions about accessing online reports, please call Lisa Duffey at (406) 994-4323.

Ordering Tags

If you plan on enrolling calves in the Montana Beef Network for 2004-2005, please call Lisa Duffey at 406-994-4323 to order tags and schedule a date for MBN staff to come assist you with tag application and data collection. We anticipate being busy this fall, so the sooner you call, the better chance you will have of getting on the schedule.

continued at right and on p. 4

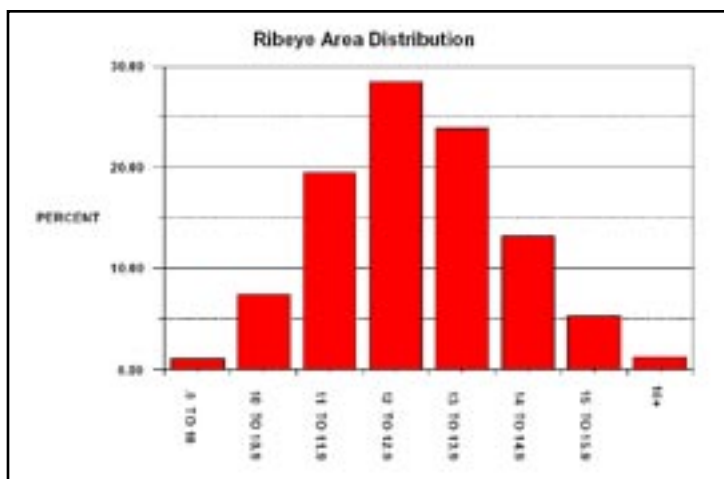
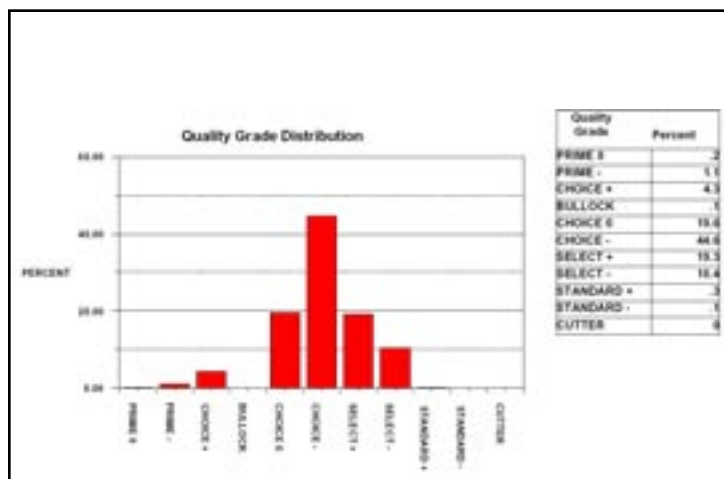


BQA – Vaccine Administrator Safety

It is important to be very careful when giving live-stock vaccinations. If you are accidentally injected with a livestock vaccine, take necessary action to protect your health. The information below is courtesy of Dee Griffin, University of Nebraska.

Passport

In light of recent industry events (a positive BSE case and national animal identification discussions), it is becoming more common and even more necessary to pass on records with sold calves. Health records help the feeder know how the calves have been treated and what the feedyard health protocol should be. Birth date records may help avoid discounts for calves mistakenly aged over 30 months at harvest time. The Montana Beef Network recommends using a herd treatment form or certification passport to share this type of information. A sample form is included on page 4 for your information and/or use.



Product	Risk	Action, if exposed
Vaccines		
Modified Live Virus	Minimal	Wash and treat with a topical antibacterial ointment. See a doctor if swelling or pain develops.
Modified Live Bacterial	Potential to cause disease	See a doctor immediately, taking the label/bottle with you.
Killed Virus/Bacterial	Minimal	Wash and treat with a topical antibacterial ointment. See a doctor if swelling or pain develops.
Medications		
Injectable/Oral	Potential allergic response	If known allergy, do not work in area where animals treated.
Micotil	Dangerous	Apply ice to injection site. Take label to ER or physician. Call Lilly emergency hotline: 317-276-2000.
Lutalyse	Potential allergic/asthmatic response. Dangerous to pregnant women	Pregnant women should not handle or be exposed to any prostaglandin (can be absorbed through the skin).
Dexamethasone	Dangerous to pregnant women	Pregnant women should not handle or be exposed to this medication.
Antiparasitics		
Injectable	Minimal	Wash exposed area and contaminated clothing. See a doctor if an allergic-like response develops.
Pour-On/Topical/Oral	Minimal	Wash exposed area and contaminated clothing. See a doctor if an allergic-like response develops.
Organophosphates	Potentially dangerous	High concentrations & long term exposure could be dangerous. See a doctor immediately if an allergic-like response develops.

Cattle Certification Passport

Producer Name: _____ BQA #: _____

Ranch Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Dehorned?	Y / N	Castrated?	Y / N
Bunk Broke?	Y / N	Brands & Location:	_____
Medicated Feed Additive?	Y / N	Product:	_____
Mineral Package?	Y / N	Product:	_____

No. of Steers: _____	Sire Breeds: _____
No. of Heifers _____	Dam Breeds: _____
Date Weaned: _____	Hide Color: _____

Treatment	Date	Product/Company	Product Lot #	Dose/Route (SQ/IM/IV)	Administrator
Clostridial					
Booster					
IBR/HVD/PI-3/BRSV					
Booster					
Pasteurella					
Booster					
H. Somnus					
Brucellosis					
Coccidiosis					
Internal parasites					
External parasites					
Implant					
Antibiotics					
Other					

To simplify record keeping, attach box tops of products to the form.

I hereby certify this group of cattle have been processed as stated above.

Producer Signature: _____ Date: _____

Keep a copy for your records and pass a copy to the buyer and/or feeder.

Reading a Carcass Data Report: What Does it Mean?

by Brian Rainey, Graduate Student, MSU Animal and Range Sciences Department

Interpreting the components of a carcass data report provides the rancher with an understanding of how well their calves met customer requirements, genetic potential, feedlot performance and value of the product compared to national standards.

Normally a carcass report includes the slaughter date, when the animal was graded, number of steers or heifers, yield (dressing percent), quality grade (% Prime, % Choice, and % Select or lower) and yield grade (1, 2, 3, 4, 5). The report should also include a marbling score. Finally the legend will define abbreviations for “out” cattle (condemned) and should include program codes when individual whole carcass data is collected. This article provides a brief description of how these values were determined.

Dressing percent (DP) is calculated using the following equation:

$$DP = 100 - (\text{live weight} - \text{hot carcass weight}) / \text{live weight} \times 100.$$

For example if steer “a” had a live weight of 1250 lbs. and his hot carcass weight was 792 lbs. then his dressing percent would be calculated as:

$$DP = 100 - (1250 - 792) / 1250 \times 100 \text{ making steer a's dressing percent } 63.36.$$

Table 1 illustrates individual carcass data for two steers as it may appear on a data report. As cattle move through the packing plant they are assigned a carcass identification number that will allow for correlation with electronic ID tags and or visual ID tags. This article also includes a list of definitions followed by quality and yield grade determinations for these two animals.

Hot carcass weight is the weight of the carcass following exsanguination and after removal of the hide and offal (often called “the drop”).

Marbling score is the score assigned to a carcass

based on the amount of intramuscular fat of the longissimus muscle and is determined by a USDA grader.

PYG or preliminary yield grade is based upon the fat thickness and is just an estimate.

BF or back fat in inches is the measurable amount of fat over the longissimus muscle between the 12th and 13th rib interface.

% KPH is the % of internal fat found in the body cavity of a carcass specifically in the regions of the kidneys, pelvis, and heart. It may be estimated visually or calculated based on the change in carcass weight following removal of fat from these areas.

REA or ribeye area is the area of the longissimus muscle in square inches and is measured between the 12th and 13th rib.

Quality grade is determined based upon the marbling and maturity of a carcass and defines the overall quality of individual carcasses. Marbling is an indicator of juiciness and flavor in retail cuts of meat. Marbling scores as they are presented on a carcass data report generally are as follow: 100-199 = practically devoid, 200-299 = traces, 300-399 = select, 400-499 = small, 500-599 = modest, 600-699 = moderate, 700-799 = slightly abundant, and 800-899 = moderately abundant.

Often times these numbers may be expressed as a decimal as seen in Table 1. As a result, an animal that has a marbling score of 4.8 is equivalent to the marbling score of 480 or “small” amounts of marbling. Feeder calves in the U.S. tend to be harvested at an average age of approximately 18 months. Cattle with a physiological maturity of less than 30 months of age are considered “A” maturity and, therefore, qualify for the grades of Prime, Choice, Select, and Standard. If we consider a carcass to have a marbling score of 480 and to be of “A” maturity, then that animal's carcass

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Table 1. Whole carcass data report excluding items found in the legend

HEAD TAG	EID TAG NUMBER	TAG COLOR	CARCASS WT	MARB SCORE	PYG	BF	% KPH FAT	RIB EYE AREA	USDA YG	QUALITY GRADE	CALC YG
1	7497681	red	707	4.8	4.2	0.88	2.2	11.2	4	Choice -	4.2
2	7498624	green	767	3.9	3.0	0.40	2.0	14.0	3	Select	2.3

would have a quality grade of low choice (Ch -). A 390 would be considered to be a Select. For a complete quality grade chart, refer to the Montana Beef Quality Assurance handbook, p. 19, or go on-line to www.mbn.montana.edu, www.usda.gov, or www.beef.org.

USDA Yield Grade (YG) is the subjective yield grade that is assigned to carcasses in a packing plant by a USDA grader. Calculated YG is the yield grade based on a calculation utilizing the fat thickness, REA, KPH, and HCW of an individual carcass.

Yield grades determine which carcasses have the greatest amounts of saleable meat ("cutability"). Yield grades are numbered 1 through 5 with 1 having the most cutability and 5 having the least. Yield grades are calculated based upon the Hot Carcass Weight (HCW), Ribeye area (REA), Backfat Thickness, and % Kidney, Pelvic and Heart fat (KPH) for an individual carcass. The formula for calculating YG is:

$$2.5 + (2.5 \times \text{fat-thickness, in}) + (0.2 \times \text{KPH}) - (0.32 \times \text{REA, in}^2) + (0.0038 \times \text{HCW lbs.})$$

The calculated YG for animal 1 from the previous table would be determined by the following:

$$\text{YG} = 2.5 + (2.5 \times 0.88) + (0.2 \times 2.2) - (0.32 \times 11.2) + (0.0038 \times 707)$$

$$\text{YG} = 2.5 + 2.2 + 0.44 - 3.584 + 2.6866$$

$$\text{YG} = 4.24$$

The calculated YG for animal 2 would then be:

$$\text{YG} = 2.5 + (2.5 \times 0.40) + (0.2 \times 2.0) - (0.32 \times 14.0) + (0.0038 \times 767)$$

$$\text{YG} = 2.5 + 1.0 + 0.40 - 4.48 + 2.9146$$


$$\text{YG} = 2.33$$

The National Cattlemen's Beef Quality Audit suggested that the following carcass characteristics were considered optimal for consumer eating satisfaction.

Suggested Industry Targets

Carcass weight (HCW)	600-800 lbs.
Backfat thickness (BF)	0.3-0.45 inches
Ribeye area (REA)	12.5-14.0 sq. in.
Yield grade (YG)	2.0 or less
Quality grade (QG)	Select + to Choice

Based on these targets, how did steer 1 do in terms of carcass weight, ribeye area, yield grade and quality grade?

For more information on cattle grading and carcass data reports please refer to the websites above or contact Dr. John Paterson, PAS, Extension Beef Specialist at 406-994-5562 or johnp@montana.edu. 

This Year, Consider Steer-A-Year

by Mike Tess, MSU Animal & Range Sciences Department Head

At home, the door of our refrigerator is covered with pictures of children, grandchildren, parents and friends; the side by the telephone is covered with frequently called numbers and reminders. A calendar hangs on the wall nearby. I need lists, calendars, and notes to keep me organized and help me remember important things I want to do. This year I hope you will consider putting the words "Steer-A-Year" on your refrigerator.

Steer-A-Year (SAY) is one of the most important and visible ways that folks in the livestock industry can help agriculture's next generation. Donations to SAY help provide educational experiences for MSU students. Most donors give steers, but several options are available. All donors can specify what student organizations benefit from their gift. Importantly, donated steers are used in beef cattle courses at MSU, enriching the educational experiences of Ag students. To quote Dean Peterson, Judith Gap rancher and chairman of the SAY Steering Committee: "I feel the purpose of the Steer-A-Year Program is to enrich the future of the beef industry by enhancing student educational opportunities through your individual contributions."

SAY is the primary source of support for the MSU Livestock Judging Team. We're blessed with an outstanding coach, Marc King. Marc does a super job recruiting, teaching and mentoring our team members. This year's team includes: Nicole Griffin (Miles City), Scott Perkins (Deer Lodge), Lisa Derzay (Deer Lodge), Kelsey Rolfe (Bozeman), Gary Todd (Big Timber), and Cody Wilsey (Big Timber). In addition to collegiate judging contests, the Judging Team represents MSU at a variety of events in Montana. As Marc says: "We're working out in the state with Montana's young people." This summer the Judging Team helped Marc conduct the 4H Judging Camp here at MSU, served as officials at the state 4H Livestock Judging Contest, and is busy judging youth livestock shows at county fairs across Montana. I think it's safe to say that the MSU Livestock Judging Team is influencing hundreds of young people across the state each year.

Please join us in supporting Montana's next generation. Give me a call (994-3721) and I'll be happy to send you more information and answer your questions. Next time you go to the refrigerator, remember: This Year, Consider Steer-A-Year.



Youth Market Beef Contest: A New Program for Montana Youth

by Travis Standley, Graduate Student, MSU Animal and Range Sciences

June 1, 2004 marked the start of a new 4-H educational program which is designed to give students experience in “finishing” beef cattle to market weights. Phillips County Extension Agent Marko Manoukian and agents from around the state of Montana organized what will become an annual competition that demonstrates the challenges in cattle management from the time of weaning until harvest.

The program required that contestants purchase three beef animals that they would feed until finished market weights. The 4-H’ers were required to maintain detailed records of animal performance, health, and feed input costs. The competition was completed at Midland Bulltest facilities when contestants “sold” their pen of cattle to a panel of judges who evaluated them on a live basis and also on carcass characteristics. The cattle were transported to the packing company of Swift and Co. in Greeley, Colo. where whole carcass data were collected. The judges accuracy and most profitable pen of steers was then determined and awards given. The champion belt buckle was provided by Harvest States Cooperative.

Table 1 illustrates the overall average and range of cattle sold by the 4-H participants.

Table 1. Carcass traits averaged for all pens

	Range in values		
	Average	High	Low
Carcass weight	755	1005	630
Backfat thickness	.49	.96	.20
%Kidney, pelvic and heart fat	1.9	2.20	1.5
Ribeye area	12.8	14.64	10.97
Quality grade	Choice	Prime	Select
Yield grade	2.88	4.5	1.63
Total \$ value of each steer	1042.04	1261.49	805.74



Judging steers near Columbus

Table 2 shows results for the top pen of steers, which were owned by Drew Householder. It also shows costs that were incurred during the feeding period. The deductions in the miscellaneous column were brand inspection, beef check off, trucking, and carcass data collection. These deductions were not part of the feed costs or the purchase price of the contestant’s animal, but did factor in to the overall profit of the pens.

More information and judging results will follow during the next several weeks. If you are interested in participating in this program, please see your local Extension agent for more details. 🐮

Table 2. Most profitable pen of three steers, owned by Drew Householder

Calf ID #	Days fed	Live wt.	Daily gain	Carcass weight	Feed cost/cwt, \$	Misc. costs, \$
3474	170	1298	3.34	782	41.10	44.95
3472	170	1284	3.38	798	40.67	44.95
3473	170	1264	3.29	763	41.76	44.95

Producer Profile: The Jim Ballard Ranch

An interview conducted by John Pfister, Extension Agent for Musselshell-Golden Valley Counties

How was the ranch started?

My dad bought the Brownly Ranch in 1958. This particular area belonged to Spidells. He bought that several years later. It made a nice ranch because it's all one nice big "block." I'm fortunate because now we're always working with Robert Lee, and we've picked up his Big Timber pasture to my south and we may possibly make more agreements and try to expand on this operation. We both look at the same things, as far as running cattle. We have made an agreement on how we will rotate using his and using mine, and going through, basically, three pastures there for summer range. But even with that included in the ranch, there is no way we'll get back up to that. This ranch with Robert Lee's over there, we should be running 350 pairs out here and not hauling water and things should be going along pretty easy. Last year we hauled 1,500 gallons of water every single day.

Robert doesn't have any water in this pasture, but I have a well just across the fence—a windmill, and it would only water about 30 cows a day, and we had about 85 pairs up there so we hauled 1,500 gallons a day in there to help that well. I've put a solar pump in there and I believe we will be able to water 90 pairs every day without hauling water.

What advice did your dad give you when you started ranching?

Dad told me that there were two things he needed for cattle production: One was water and one was the grass. Because of this drought, we have had to go outside to find both, and the purchasing of these inputs are making it real tough to make enough money to keep things afloat.

His rule of thumb was that you needed to have six months of feed in front of you at all times. If it's June, you'd better have your December feed—which means haystacks. When I was a kid it was a general rule that when we got done feeding our cows in the spring, next year's hay supply was in the hay yard before we ever started haying. We always had a year's supply of hay left over and we used to sell our hay, too. Of course, the drought has reduced that to where we've bought hay four out of the last five years.

So originally, before the drought, we were running 250 pairs plus the replacement stock on the ranch and we did a little bit of rotating. We put in a lot of cross fences over the years so the rotation is getting better. This place should run 250 pairs every year and this year I will run on our original ranch about 45 pairs. That's about what we ran last year. The rest of it is leased.

Are your boys interested in coming back to the ranch?

They are interested in it, and they're going to be pretty good cowboys, but I encourage my kids to go do other things. I encourage them to find other interests. Alan has



signed up to go to a diesel college in Denver this fall, and I told him to go out and try some other things and maybe make a little money and when you come back hopefully this place will be here.

My younger son, Ross, is still in high school. He's really interested in livestock and they would both be good ranchers. Agriculture is not a good way to make a living, we all know that. I would like to see one or maybe both of them come back. If we can keep working with a neighbor like Robert Lee, maybe we can put the whole thing together and the kids can have enough to survive on. I just don't think that the 160 pairs will support a family and pay the bills, and we just got the cattle paid for, but I only have about half of the cattle left that I paid for.

Your cattle are primarily black cattle?

Yes. We had a lot of black baldy cows and I've been working towards more of straight black cattle. We buy, registered black Angus bulls and even though I think we don't have the best cattle in the world, we're pretty happy with them. We've been in a drought here for our seventh year, and last year was one of the hottest summers that we've ever had. We've weaned the calves early, backgrounded them and I just put them down on the river and let them graze there until we brought them to the headquarters. I've had real good luck with them. I had one calf that had pneumonia for about two days, but I haven't had a death loss in four years, and my steer calves walked off this ranch the 10th of December at 720 pounds.

Was this one of your pastures that had been rested for two years in your rotation?

Yes. This pasture had been rested for two full years and if everything had been normal, we'd have had cattle in there when the fire started. Fortunately, we were late. So,

we would have put 50 yearling heifers over here and they would have made it the summer.

And so, the fire comes along and wipes out one of your rotations- Yes, the fire took out the rotation. We intended to use it this year, this was the year to use it, and maybe it was a blessing in disguise that we had good ground cover on this and it burned as clean as it did. We won't know if that's a blessing for two or three years, but it may very well have been a blessing to clean this out and then it'll start over. But, if it doesn't rain a lot it's going to be a disaster.

You lost close to 1200 acres in this fire?

Pretty close—1,200 acres and some table top flat acres. There are probably three to five times that many acres in here, but because of the terrain there's a lot of up and down. From my perspective, we lost more than 1,200 acres because there are a lot of hills and canyons and a lot of terrain out here. I guess if you figure you run 50 yearling heifers over here at \$10 a month, five months, it'd be \$4,000 worth of grass. But, the reclamation could be \$25,000 to \$30,000 to get us back to where we can get \$2,000 worth of grass per year.

Describe when the fire took off and jumped from 100 acres to 1200 acres.

The night before it jumped, I was out here with my kids and a couple of friends from Billings came up, and we drove around this 100-acre fire. We found a place where a stump and root were underneath the Cat line and we pulled that out. We stayed there and opened it up and let it burn until it was gone and we put it out. I don't know if the fire burned underneath the Cat trail or if something got picked up and blew it over, but when we came out, we killed that fire on that rocky ridge by hand. There were four of us out here. I thought we stopped it. I had those guys scattered across that fire line and I said I was going up on top of the hill and look around.

That's when I discovered it had gone across the road. It had gotten over the top of that hill and took off, and we didn't know that. Well, that was all black across the top and across the road so I came back to get the kids and I met Joe Hammil, the fire chief. I said I sat in my pickup and my kids are over here watching this fire line. He said he'd go down and pick them up.

Well, then I was up on top and we were trying to figure out what to do next and a little time had gone by so I came back down to see what the guys were doing, and everybody was gone. I got a little panicked. My pickup was gone, Joe's pickup was gone, kids were all gone, everybody was gone. So I went back to the top of the hill and by that time it was getting ready to flare up again and go south, and it did and everybody backed off. Then that big bomber came in and it bombed on the other side of the ridge. Well, the kids and apparently Joe went with them, up that Cat trail and got on that road. They were down there chinking a fire line when the bomber came in and dropped fire retardant. It got them.

Eventually, I went and told Floyd that I didn't know where my kids were. I was on the south side of the fire, and they were on the north side. Actually, they were in a safer place than I was. So, we were looking for them and a little



time had gone by and here comes Joe. I stopped him on the road and asked him where everybody went. He said they were over on the line and a fire truck was with them so they were with someone who had a radio and a way of communication because they weren't attached to any fire department or anything.

When the fire slowed down I found them and they told me their story. I made them come back up out of that canyon because at that time there was nobody with them. It was pretty bad, but they figured they could stop that thing right there. Eventually, after the state fire crews got here, they sent the crew in there to finish what they were doing. They really have learned how to read the terrain and they did pretty good. You know, they aren't the fire department, but they went out and put some fires out.

There are a lot of stories, different people and what they did and how they did it. I'll never hear them all. I don't even know who all was out here. This first fire was 109 acres and they figure there were 60 people on that fire. I don't even know who half of them were. I don't know how many were on this bigger fire here. Tony Erickson from Broadview showed up with his farm truck and 1500 gallons of water on it wanting to know what he could do. I told him I needed him to get up to the county road, and he was the last guy other than myself who would see this pasture before it burned. That's the kind of concern we had from friends and neighbors and other people, and boy, that really helped. It's quite a heart-felt feeling when these guys will do that. We've fought fires on a lot of other people's ground, too, and when they all come to your place it really gets to you.

What about re-seeding and weed control?

So far I am kind of slow getting started here. I injured myself with a chainsaw and I'm just getting around again. There are some tough areas where the terrain is pretty rough and there's still a lot of timber, but there's also a lot of knapweed. I had it pretty well cleaned up after 15 years of spraying, and I was pretty happy with it. We had a good cover of grass, and I'm pretty sure the knapweed is going to show its ugly head in places where we can't reach. It's pretty tough to spray down on stuff like this. Down on the river, the insects (fleas beetles) are working for us. There's almost no knapweed in that area, and it's never been sprayed. But

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Producer profile continued

it takes a lot of years. In the mean time, you need good grass production so you can't really sit here and stay off of it for 10 years. We've got to speed that up a little bit.

I'm going to have to get with some people and learn what I can, and I think I have the machinery and we can get this stuff seeded. We're working on the last map now to get an idea as to how many acres I think we need to do. Get some grass in here on the roads and hope that Mother Nature steps up to the plate and gets some grass on it. Once again, I'm sure we'll let this sit for two more years, so we'll probably go four years and never touch it with any income-producing activities. Of course, that means the money will come out of something else.

What about fencing costs?

Steel has gone up a lot and when I filled out the application I sort of shot in the dark at \$5,000 a mile to rebuild the fences. I don't know if that's even close. I know steel posts are \$3. So, there's approximately three miles of fence. Some of it may not be too bad and we might get it down to two miles.

We are definitely not abusing the pastures out here. We could use this a little harder and maybe make a few more bucks, but I'm always looking at next year. We need to run a few less cows, get a little more performance out of them and find that middle ground where it'll financially work. There are a lot of things to watch, it's just incredible. Most people think farmers and ranchers are just kind of a bunch of dummies running around in the woods, but there's a lot of thinking to it and preparing and getting your feed gathered up for winter time, rangeland gathered up for summer time and the trick out here has been getting water and grass in the same place at the same time.

This fire just completely ruined that, because I have one well now and that's the only water there is for this pasture and the one across the fence. We kind of go back and forth and I will probably have to use that on the other side of the fence.

We drilled a new well and we've got a mile and a half pipeline, three drinking tanks and a storage tank. It's quite a system. A lot of guys have 20 miles of pipeline, so this is fairly small. I spent the last five years out here working on this project so that's a big chunk of money and hopefully these things will last for a lot of years and we'll recover that, but when you're spending that kind of money just for the water, boy, it takes it right out of the bottom line quick.

Usually there's water running down this creek until the first of July. There's a dam up there that usually has water in it all year round. All those supplies are gone. I've got four springs that are gravity-flow into tanks with float valves on them, and we don't waste any of that water. They're all dry, and they've been dry for years. The creek's dry, and the Mussellshell River has dried up the last couple of summers, in late summer. So, water is an absolute item and we've thrown a lot of money trying to continue forward in a situation

continued on back page

Drought symposium, continued

The morning schedule and speaker in Rapid City are the same as at the Billings' meeting. The afternoon schedule in Rapid City is:

1 to 3 p.m.—Breakout sessions on drought issues. Participants attend two out of the four sessions offered. Topics are early weaning, nutrition and management programs for calves, economic considerations, and backgrounding systems.

3:30—Breakout sessions on backgrounding. Participants choose two out of the three sessions offered. Topics are health programs for weaned calves, backgrounding systems and water quality.

6 p.m.—Buffet. Panel discussion with backgrounding experts from Wyoming, North Dakota and South Dakota.

For more information, visit <http://www.4statebackgrounding.montana.edu>. To register or receive a brochure about the symposiums, contact Anita Gray at (406) 994-3414 or use the registration form below.

Registration

Backgrounding Calves:

Options Under Drought Conditions

Billings: Aug. 3, 2004 • Rapid City: Aug. 5, 2004

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Registration Fee:

Advance (by July 29) \$35

At the door \$45

Return registration form by mail to:

Anita Gray
119 Linfield Hall, MSU
Bozeman, MT 59717

To register by phone call (406) 994-3414;
or by e-mail, contact anitag@montana.edu


To request disability accommodations or inform us of special dietary or other needs, please contact Anita Gray at (406)994-3414.

Holiday Inn, MT (406) 248-7701
Ramkota Inn, SD (605) 343-8550

Montana Beef Network: Steer Gains from the Ranch to Harvest

by Kelsey Rolfe, MSU Undergraduate Student and John Paterson, Extension Specialist, Animal and Range Science

Production data from 2002-2003 were summarized from 11 Montana Beef Network producers randomly selected from across the state. Weaning weights (WW), calculated live weight at slaughter, hot carcass weight (HCW), days fed in the feedlot, and average daily gains (ADG) were summarized. Results were sorted primarily on rate of gain from fastest to slowest. A simple average was calculated for each of the categories in order for individual ranchers to compare their steer's daily gains with the simple (not weighted) average of the 11 ranches. These results show the relationships among the MBN participants in terms of weaning weights, carcass weights, daily gains and calves that gained less than 2.5 lbs/day. One

set of calves gained 3.75 lbs/day for 206 days while the slowest gaining steers averaged 2.90 lbs/day. Four ranches didn't have any calves with gains less than 2.5 lbs/day while one ranch had almost 7.5% of the calves gain less than 2.5 lbs/day. Ranch 6 only had a branding weight and not a weaning weight and these calves still averaged 3.36 lbs/day until harvest; exceptional performance. The reasons for less than desired performance may be due to sickness, old cows, young cows, or some other management factor. Our focus is to give producers the individual records on these animals so that they can improve their cattle's performance to optimize production, and hopefully to increase profit. 

Ranch Number	No of steers	Weaning weight	Slaughter weight, lbs	Carcass weight, lbs	Average days in feedlot	Feedlot daily gains	% of cattle which gained less than 2.5 lbs/day
8	150	606	1379	855	206	3.75	0.0%
13	215	491	1336	828	238	3.55	5.6%
5	38	565	1339	830	227	3.43	2.6%
6	127	237*	1384	858	341**	3.36	0.0%
1	217	627	1377	853	224	3.35	3.2%
9	115	632	1301	807	205	3.26	4.3%
10	83	505	1265	784	234	3.21	6.0%
12	28	377	1196	742	267	3.07	0.0%
11	24	569	1193	740	206	3.03	4.0%
2	160	596	1245	772	222	2.97	7.5%
4	29	546	1180	731	218	2.90	0.0%
Avg of 11 Ranches	1186	551	1290	800	235	3.26	

*This weight was taken at branding.

** This includes time from branding to weaning.

If you are interested in learning more about the performance of your weaned calf crop call John Paterson at 406-994-5562



Upcoming Events

Four-state beef consortium meeting, Drought and marketing calves. Billings, Aug 3. Call (406) 994-3415 for information.

Fort Keogh laboratory dedication, Miles City, Aug. 10

Fort Keogh field day, Miles City, Aug. 11

Producer profile continued

where maybe we should have just sold all the cows and sat back and did nothing, but this is what I do, so I'm just doing what I can.

Final thoughts?

We're really working on our genetics and we're selecting cattle that really perform. We can't run as many as we used to so we're going after performance. We'll calve primarily in March, with a few February and a few April calves in there, and try to keep it no more than 45 days and we come in with 98 and 99% conception rates in the fall and it's working well.

You've got your costs, taxes that come every year, and you have to have something to pay them with. We have some land payments here and we were still paying on the cattle, so we need to keep trying to move forward and continue to make some money. It is costing us a lot of money to just break even.



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