

Bluestem Breezes
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The Decision

We are moving into a tremendously busy season as calving season is just on the horizon (or closer) for many of us. Regardless, don't forget about the impact of marketing your cattle in a manner that gains your pocketbook the maximum dollars. This week, K-State Beef Systems Specialist Justin Waggoner addresses this topic in "The Decision":

If you've been growing your calves since fall weaning, you've likely been considering the next steps: sell them as feeders or finish them out.

The markets need to be considered in that decision process, as well as your access to feed resources and facilities. Depending on how you've managed your calves will also weigh into the decision. If you've used an accelerated growing program, with a target gain of 2.75-3.0 lbs/day, you may be able to step up and finish at least a portion of the cattle ahead of the normal May-June volume of finished calves. Performance, both past and future, will drive your ability to get the calves finished on time.

On the other hand, if you've grown the calves at a more moderate pace, they may work well in the marketplace as feeders. And if you've grown them at a very conservative pace, the lighter end may work for someone as stockers. Regardless, be sure to know your target market prior to selling, and group the calves according to your intended market. Analysis repeatedly shows that the 2 biggest drivers of feeder calf value in the auction marketplace are size and uniformity of lots.

If you decide to finish the calves, and you are determined to hit the April and May markets, it is critical to begin stepping up the grain fraction of the diet. Process the grain thoroughly to improve efficiency of utilization. In order to maintain a good mix of otherwise dry, fine, particles, it is helpful to include a moist ingredient, such as silage or wet byproducts.

Most importantly, consider all factors (grain, feeder, and fed cattle markets, forage supply, byproduct cost and availability, time and labor going into calving and planting seasons) when making this critical decision. Finishing cattle requires focus and attention to detail and should not be taken lightly. However, given sufficient planning and coordination, seeing your calf crop through to finish can be a rewarding experience

Further information is available by visiting the Extension Office (215 Kansas, Courthouse, Alma; kamayer@ksu.edu; 765-3821). For Bluestem Breezes archives, check out wabaunsee.ksu.edu.