**Beef Cattle Marketing Alliances**

**By: Eve H. Honeycutt, Lenoir and Greene Counties**
Adapted from an article by James D. Sartwelle, III, Ernest E. Davis, James Minert, and Rob Borchardt, Texas Cooperative Extension

Often cattle producers look for ways to increase the profit margin in beef production. Cutting costs is the most obvious first step, but an alternative is a better marketing strategy, such as a “strategic alliance”. There are three basic types of alliances in which producers can associate themselves: breed association-sponsored, commercial, and natural/implant-free.

**Breed Association Sponsored**
Certified Angus Beef (CAB) is one of the oldest and best known of these alliances. CAB doesn’t directly price cattle on a grid system like other alliances, rather it identifies carcasses that meet several criteria for CAB designation. Other alliances include the American Hereford Association (Certified Hereford Beef), American International Charolais Association (Beef Charolais), and North American Limousin Foundation (Limousin Grid). These alliances offer direct access to carcass pricing devices that are at least partially negotiated by association personnel. Many of these groups also offer special marketing programs, list feeder cattle for sale, or sponsor special sales for members.

**Commercial Carcass Alliances**
Private firms now offer grids or marketing arrangements that fit the high quality beef target and/or the red meat yield target. Most of these firms create their niche with cattlemen who are likely to produce certain types of carcasses and beef processors who merchandise that type of beef. Some examples of these firms are Angus America, Angus GeneNet, and U.S. Premium Beef. In addition to providing access (for a fee) to a beef processor’s carcass pricing mechanism, some of the firms/alliances offer other services to members. These include discounted semen or bull purchases from carcass-proven sires, members-only replacement heifer and feeder cattle sales, and listing of “approved” feedyards.
Natural/Implant-Free Carcass Alliances
Some of these alliances are among the first type of alliances developed. These are in a different classification because of their focus on red meat yield target. Some examples of these are Laura’s Lean Beef, Coleman’s Natural Meats, and Maverick Ranches Beef. Most of them prohibit growth enhancers (implants), ionophores and other feed additives. These groups target health conscious consumers and the grid pricing structures encourage the production of lean carcasses.

An important idea for producers to remember is to remain flexible throughout whatever marketing or alliance strategy they choose. Market trends can change and producers can spend their lifetime trying to push the genetics of the herd in one direction, only to have the trend reverse a short time later. Utilizing a reliable and trustworthy alliance and remaining flexible can greatly increase the marketing potential of a herd.

Getting Spring Pastures off to the Right Start
By: Eileen A. Coite, Wayne County

Spring pasture management and hay season is here again. Producers should to keep a few things in mind to ensure spring pasture growth starts off right and leads into a productive summer. Below I’ve listed several management steps needed to achieve and maintain a productive, healthy pasture or hay field.

First of all, if a soil sample has not been taken in the past 2-3 years, it’s time to take one. Ideally, a soil sample is taken prior to the growing season, but anytime is better than none. Fields that are part of a waste plan are generally up to date, due to plan requirements of a yearly soil sample. Soil fertility changes over time and may not always be optimum for forage growth. Establishing and planting forages for new pastures also requires soil sampling.

Pastures in southeastern NC will need to maintain around a 6-6.5 pH for maximum productivity. Soil pH tends to drop off over time and additional lime may need to be applied in order to bring these levels back to normal. The soil sample will provide useful information with both lime recommendations and fertilization needs.

The second important step to starting off spring growth is fertilization. Meeting the needs of the plant will allow for the optimum production of the crop, whether for grazing or hay. Nutrients are abundant for many producers, with the availability of hog or poultry waste for fertilization. These products work well for providing nutrient needs for forages. Those without access to natural fertilizers will need to provide commercial fertilizers to fill the nutrient gap. Fertilization for warm season grasses should be applied in split applications throughout the growing season, generally with the first application in April. Again, the soil test is a handy tool in knowing what the nutrient needs of your pasture are, being based on what is currently available in the soil and depending on the type of pasture you are growing.

A third factor to consider may be selectively grazing areas when they’re ready, in other words, rotationally grazing. Many of us turn all the animals out on the whole pasture, when some areas may be overgrazed and in need of rest. Rotationally grazing provides much needed rest to the grass and forces animals to become more efficient in their consumption of forages, therefore reducing waste. Generally, temporary fence posts and polywire or polytape will achieve this goal.

Finally, along with the growth of our pastures, comes the growth of various weeds. Generally, we want to get rid of weeds, and there are several products on the market to help with this. For the most part, it’s too late to worry about treating winter
weeds, such as henbit, geranium, buttercup, wild mustard and garlic, since these have reached the end of their growth cycle anyway. At this point, mowing these weeds is the best option, which will allow sunlight to reach the grass below. Emerging warm season weeds, such as pigweed, dogfennel, bitter sneezeweed, sicklepod, and horsenette can be effectively controlled as long as they are treated while still immature. At the same time, chemical herbicides generally work best when applied in moderate temperature (60 degrees or better), which is right about now. One precaution to note: some herbicides are damaging to neighboring crops, such as tobacco and cotton, so be careful to select a safe product if these plants are close by. Once you’ve identified the weed or weeds you are dealing with, a selection can be made of the most ideal, appropriate, yet economical method or chemical to achieve this goal. For your convenience, I’ve attached an updated list of herbicides labeled for grass pastures. This will be helpful when making chemical selections to meet your management needs.

The Effects of Heat on Swine

By: Emily M. Adams, Livestock Agent – Onslow
Compiled from “Influence of Hot-Humid Environment on Growth Performance and Reproduction of Swine” by Myer and Bucklin, University of Florida

Environmental temperatures that are above the “comfort zone” for swine are common in the hot summer months of North Carolina. The warm environmental conditions usually do not cause death losses but they can affect the growth performance of growing-finishing pigs and also cause decreased performance in the breeding herd.

As pigs get older and larger, their optimum temperature decreases. Newborn pigs and young pigs may not be affected by heat until temperatures reach between 80-95°F. The effects of heat stress are greater with older finishing swine, sows, and boars who begin to feel the negative effects at about 68°F. If the temperatures remain above 80°F for more than 2-4 days, significant losses in performance and reproductive efficiency are possible unless some type of cooling can be provided.

Pigs have two ways of minimizing the effects of heat stress: increasing heat dissipation and reducing heat produced through body metabolism. To increase the amount of heat that their bodies can dissipate, pigs will increase their body surface by sprawling out on a cool surface. They may also begin to pant and increase their respiration rate. This helps to increase the amount of water evaporating from the lungs and will help to cool the pig. This is similar to the way that humans cool off through sweating and evaporative cooling. Pigs, on the other hand, do not sweat.

Pigs can also reduce the amount of heat produced through metabolism of feed by eating less feed. Eating, digestion, and nutrient absorption all produce heat so the reduced feed intake by the pig is a way to lower the amount of heat their bodies produce. Reduced feed intake will result in reduced growth and reduced milk production in lactating sows.

In sows, temperatures that are higher than 80°F will delay or prevent estrus, reduce conception rates, and increase early death of embryos. Heat stress in the first 13 days after breeding can reduce the survival of embryos by 30 to 40%. Heat stress that occurs during the last few weeks before farrowing may be responsible for a higher number of stillbirths. In lactating sows, temperatures above 75°F can cause reduced feed intake, which can decrease milk production. As a result, smaller pigs will be weaned and the sow will lose a larger amount of weight, making it more difficult for her to return to production.
The boar’s fertility is also affected by heat stress. Temperatures greater than 85°F can decrease sperm production and decrease sperm quality. Negative effects can last for 4 to 6 weeks after the stress since it takes up to 6 weeks for sperm to mature after production.

In order to help minimize heat stress, growing-finishing pigs, especially larger pigs, should be allowed a greater amount of floor space with fewer pigs per pen. Good insulation around the roof and ceilings in confinement buildings will help to reduce the amount of solar heat that builds up in the house. Rapid air movement over the animals will help them to disperse heat. Air speed of at least 3mph is desirable for animals raised in confinement during warmer weather.

Water sprinkler systems are also very effective for wet-skin cooling. Many operate by thermostat-controlled timers that wet the pigs and then allow them to dry. Usually they are designed to run for 1 to 2 minutes every 30 minutes once the temperature rises above a set value (usually 75-85°F range).

Since pigs reduce their feed intake during periods of high temperatures, a diet that is more dense in nutrients will help reduce production losses. Adding fat into the diet will help increase the density of calories and will help maintain energy intake during the periods of hot weather. Fibrous feeds, such as ground hay, or wheat midds, produce a good deal of heat when they are digested while fats only produce a small amount of heat. Therefore, fibrous feeds should be reduced during periods of heat stress.

Heat stress and the reduced feed intake that results from it can have major impacts on production. Using a simple, reliable, and easily maintained cooling system, along with increasing the nutrient and energy density of the diet, can minimize the effects.

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**Scrapie Flock Certification Program**

*by Amy Andrews, Craven & Jones Counties*

There is still time to sign up for the Scrapie Flock Certification Program!

Sheep and goat producers who have not already signed up for the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program should plan to sign up soon! The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the sheep industry have made numerous attempts to eradicate scrapie disease, a fatal, degenerative disease affecting the central nervous system of sheep and goats. Infected flocks that contain a high percentage of susceptible animals can experience significant production losses.

Producers participating in the program have agreed to immediately report scrapie-suspect animals to their local animal health officials, officially identify and keep records of their animals.

Current information on enrolled, certified, source, and infected flocks is also available 24 hours a day through a toll-free automated telephone voice response service at (800) 545-USDA (8732). To reach Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)go to www.aphis.usda.gov and type the word Scrapie in the search engine. For more information about the Voluntary Scrapie Flock Certification Program, Contact USDA, APHIS, Veterinary Services at (301) 734 – 6954.

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**Selection and Evaluation for Breeding Goats**

*by Amy Andrews, Craven & Jones Counties*

Information from “Selection and Evaluation” by Preston R. Faris

When evaluating animals for breeding traits and determining which are to be selected and which are to be culled, we should look at several criteria.
**Structural Soundness**

Everything about the animal is built on structure. This includes making sure the goat is not blind. Jaws should be evenly opposed so the teeth touch the dental pad when the goat's mouth is closed. An animal with an overbite or under bite should be culled. Horns should be strong and wide apart. Curvature of horns is important to consider. You do not want the horns to wrap back to the eyes or cause irritation to the neck. The neck should be strong neck balanced in length to the body and blended well into the shoulder. The neck should come off the top of the shoulder, not set too low. A high neck set allows the animal to naturally keep his head high and alert. The goat should have a strong level top, not dipping behind the shoulders. A goat with a weak top will only get worse. The hip should be level and not steep. Steep rumps are the starting place for an unsound hind leg. Legs should be set on the corners of the body. Pasterns should be strong and yet flexible enough to allow the goat to move freely. One of the greatest leg problems is post legged where the legs have no flex in the hock joint. Post legged goats will not hold up in breeding nor with age. Hooves should point straight forward as the animal sets it's hoof on the ground. The base of the goat's tail should be centered straight. A tail that is offset or that curls upward should be selected against.

**Reproductive**

The reproductive organs for the goat should certainly be sound. Teats should both be well-formed and equal in size with no more an a 2 inch split at the apex of the scrotum. Research relates split scrotums to poorly shaped udders in females and to cryptorchidism in male offspring. Does with vulvas that turn up on the end can cause a problem in breeding. Does should reach puberty and be fertile at 6-7 months of age. There is no excuse for any doe not to have kidded by age 2. The udder of the does and structure of teats is very important. Udders should be well formed with no more than 2 functional teats on each side. A split teat must be at least 50% separated. Clusters and fishtail teats should not be accepted. Over sized or bulbous teats and pendulous udders are very serious problems and if accepted into the breeding program an result in real headaches for the future.

**Muscle**

Meat goats must have muscle! The topline of the animal supplies the best cuts of meat and should feel smooth and firm not bony. Stifle to stifle should be thick and show good muscular development on both the inside and outside portions of the leg down to the hock. Body condition influences thickness in animals since fat is interspersed between muscles. The forearm is a very good indicator of true muscling.

**Eye Appeal**

Balance and symmetry in the way all the animal's parts fit together is the most important factor in eye appeal. Females should be feminine with clean fronts. Their bodies should gradually become deeper near the rear flank. Bucks should be masculine with strong heads and a rugged bold spring to the ribs to carry the respiratory system essential for their survival during rut and breeding season.

### Forage Management Tips

**MAY**

- Plant warm-season perennial grasses such as common or "Cheyenne" bermudagrass.
- Plant summer annuals such as pearl millet by May 15.
- Fertilize warm-season grasses with nitrogen after each cutting or every four to six weeks on pastures.
- If irrigation is available, hybrid bermudagrass sprigs may be planted, but weed control will be essential.
Spray pasture weeds while they are small (3 inches or smaller) for most effective control.

**JUNE**

- Take soil samples from fields which will be over-seeded or planted during the fall. Apply lime as far in advance of planting as possible.
- A late planting of summer annuals may be made to extend forage supply.
- To stimulate yield of warm-season grass such as bermuda, apply nitrogen after each cutting or every four to six weeks.
- Graze bermudagrass close (1 to 2 inch stubble) and harvest any growth that has not been grazed every four to six weeks.
- Control summer pasture weeds before they get too tall and mature.

### Farm Safety Day Camp

Progressive Farmer’s “Farm Safety” Day Camp will be held on Wednesday, June 14 from 8am-1:30pm at the Lenoir County Livestock Arena in Kinston. Kids from 5 to 12 years of age are invited to attend the day camp and learn about bicycle safety, disability awareness, chemical safety, large animal safety, electrical safety, fire safety, ATV safety, sun safety, and moving parts and tractor safety. The cost of the camp includes lunch, snacks, speakers, a T-shirt, a packet of safety materials, and surprise gifts. Spaces are limited so register early! Contact Eve Honeycutt at the Lenoir County Extension office at (252) 527-2191.

### 2006 SUMMER AVENUES OF INTEREST

A summer program for all youth ages 5-19 (youth must be 5 on or before January 1, 2006) will be offered by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Onslow County. The 4-H motto is “To Make the Best Better” and you can make the best better by enrolling now to learn something new and meet new people. We invite you to join us for an exciting summer!!!

**Who may enroll:** Any youth in Onslow County may enroll in one or more workshops. You do not have to be a 4-H’er. The programs are open to youth 5-19 except where age restrictions are noted.

**Registration:** To register, come by the 4-H office at 4024 Richlands Hwy. Or call us at 455-5873. You can also check our website to see if classes are full (http://onslow.ces.ncsu.edu/) All programs have registration fees which must be paid when you register. Registration will not be held at the workshop or activity.

Call 455-5873 or come by the 4-H office today to pick up a brochure.

### June Events

- **14** Farm Safety Day Camp
The Onslow County Farmers' Market opened on Saturday, **April 22, 2006** at the Onslow County Multipurpose Complex, located at 4024 Richlands Hwy. The hours of operation are **Tuesdays and Saturdays 9:00 am to 3:00 pm**. Parking is free, seniors and Farmers' Market Nutrition Vouchers will be accepted.

The market was organized in 1997 to allow area produce growers the opportunity to sell directly to consumers and allow the public to purchase fresh, locally grown produce. We strongly encourage your patronage in support of our local farmers who work hard to provide a fresh, safe product at a good value. Call our office at 910.455.5873 for product availability and special emphasis days (sweet corn, melon, etc.) Bring a friend.

A Grand Opening Dedication of the Onslow County Farmers' Market building will be held Saturday, June 24th beginning at 9:00 am. There are many activities planned with different foods highlighted throughout the day.

Recommendations for the use of chemicals are included in this publication as a convenience to the reader. The use of brand names and any mention or listing of commercial products or services in this publication does not imply endorsement by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service nor discrimination against similar products or services not mentioned. Individuals who use chemicals are responsible for ensuring that the intended use complies with current regulations and conforms to the product label. Be sure to obtain current information about usage and examine a current product label before applying any chemical. For assistance, contact an agent of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service in your county.

Sincerely,

Emily M. Adams
Agricultural Extension Agent

"HELPING PEOPLE PUT KNOWLEDGE TO WORK"

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