Consider Beef Marketing Options
Eileen A. Coite, Wayne County

So, how do you market your beef? There are so many options today, and lately beef prices have been high enough that everyone has benefitted, but will that trend continue? Some say that prices have peaked and may not continue on this level. Let’s take a look at many of the options available to producers today, and give thought to which might be the best choice for your situation.

Many producers don’t give much thought into strategic marketing. If its time to market a few calves or the bank account has dropped a bit, and its sale day at the weekly livestock auction, maybe its time to load up and head over there. This might not be a bad idea, but is it always the best choice? That is a decision all producers have to make, and having this flexible option is great, especially when prices are high. As I write this article, 5 weight steer calves brought on average 1.40 per pound this week. Heifers brought 1.26. Cull cows brought nearly 70 cents, and bulls brought 94 cents. So if you are marketing cattle things are looking good right now. What about when its not?

Marketing options increase for producers that follow a more stringent management system in their herd. Things like having a designated breeding and calving season to increase uniformity in calves, a vaccination and de-worming program to keep everyone healthy, and a calf development program to have them “bunk broke” so they will be on feed earlier once they get to their backgrounding destination.

The weekly livestock market is a great resource and probably the most used marketing option for beef producers. It gives flexibility of bringing small groups of cattle that might not be the same age, size or breed. There is also flexibility of being able to drop calves off on any given week. The downside of this is (Continued on page 2)
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(Continued from page 1) that producers must pay a commission fee to the market for this service, which is a small percent of the animal’s sale value. An understandable tradeoff for the convenient service the market provides. If your calves are not uniform, or are not on a health-care/vaccination program they will still be sold. However, premium prices won’t be paid if your calves have been vaccinated.

Another option is marketing at one of the NC graded feeder calf sales. These sales are coordinated by a combination of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture, the NC Cattlemen’s Association, NC Cooperative Extension, and participating livestock markets. Producers still have the option of bringing any number of calves, mixed sexes, sizes, and breeds, but the sales are on designated dates throughout the spring and the fall. Calves are graded by a NCDA marketing specialist and sorted by sex, grade, and weight into pens of similar calves within 100 pounds of weight. Graded sales most often ask for consigners to notify ahead of time how many calves they will be bringing, and sometimes have other requirements, such as vaccinations, de-horning, castration, etc. The plus to the graded sale versus the weekly market is that calves often bring a few to several cents more per pound.

Direct farm sales and tele-auctions are another option. Producers with large numbers of like cattle most often benefit from this type of sale, as they must fill a semi-truck with calves from one location. Video and tele-actions often also offer a way for the buyer to see the cattle ahead of time, as representatives from NCDA, Extension, or otherwise qualified and trusted verifier can assist with visiting the farm and confirm the number, size, health and quality of the cattle for the buyer.

Another option that has grown attention more recently are cattle marketing alliances. Many producers have increasingly become interested in learning more about these and deciding to participate. In alliances, several producers work together to market their calves, by having similar breeding season, health and nutrition program, as well as similar genetics. There are stricter guidelines for each producer to follow to become an alliance member, but there are advantages that come with the requirements. This is another appealing option to the buyer, knowing that the calves will be more uniform and knowing the history of these calves. Because of this, the cattle bring a premium price over the weekly auction market and graded sales.

So, remember, things are looking great right now, but as in most years, prices that are high in the spring will drop off in the fall. This has been very predictable over the years with the basic rule of supply and demand. Studies have shown that cattle prices usually peak in the months of March to May, but then usually bottom out around October. As you enjoy the high cattle prices right now, keep in mind the many marketing options that might benefit you when prices drop off in the fall, because as well all know, history often repeats itself.

Wastewater from On-farm Processing HB 162 Approved
Eve H. Honeycutt, Lenoir and Greene Counties

Farmers generating small quantities of waste water from on-farm processing activities such as making goat cheese or wine may now dispose of that water through land application so long as the application does not run into surface water or violate our ground or surface water standards. NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources will be putting together information regarding best management practices. Cooperative Extension and NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services will get that information out to farmers.

Please note that HB 162 arose from comments from farmers across the state to NC Farm Bureau, to the North Carolina Sustainable Local Food Council, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, NCDA&CS folks, NCSU Extension agents, and more. NC Farm Bureau led the effort with support from the greater agricultural community.
Weaning is the act of taking milk away from an animal’s diet and is replaced by another form of feed that will become its main source of nutrition. A producer decides on whether to wean early, which in small ruminants is less than 90 days or late which is longer than 90 days. Early or late, either way, weaning is an important part of any farmer’s management plan. There is no magic time, therefore weaning needs to be based on the circumstances and production system that is in place on the farm. The factors to consider when weaning are age, breeding season, parasite problems, the market, facilities, labor, and forage availability on the farm. It is better to wean kids when they are 2 to 2.5 times their birth weight, and lambs when they are 2.5 to 3 times their birth weight.

Late weaning is also referred to as the doe or ewe weaning the young naturally. An operation that is only kidding once a year with the lack of labor being a major problem than late weaning may be the best option to employ for that farm. The lambs and kids will continue to keep nursing until the doe or ewe’s body slows down production of milk and that forces the young to go elsewhere to find food. When the lambs/kids stop nursing, the doe/ewe will stop producing milk. In general, the longer the kid/lamb is on the doe/ewe the poorer the body condition of that mother will become over time due to the extra work she has to maintain herself and a large, growing lamb/kid. The risk of mastitis is much less. Late weaning usually allows producers to take advantage of their forage resources to finish their lambs and kids. Pasture is the cheapest form of feed much more economical than hay and grain diets. Management is simpler, as females and offspring can be maintained in a single group for a longer period of time. But there is an increased risk of infection of parasites to the kids/lambs, and more of an increased competition for forages between the older mothers and their young.

Early weaning is a desired management practice for producers who are in sheep and/or goats as a business with breeds who have a high genetic potential for growth. It takes the burden off of high-producing females making them less stressed and helps them return to a more ideal body condition for breeding back. It has been noted there is less risk of parasites when lambs/kids are weaned early and fed in a dry lot. When considering your wallet, it is less expensive to feed lambs/kids than the dams with their offspring if you have to feed grain and hay. There is a greater risk of mastitis in these dams because they may still be in peak milking production time. Early weaning causes a higher stress level in both the young as well as the dams and requires a higher level of management from the farmer. Lambs and kids weaned early are usually finished on hay and/or grain diets and are normally creep fed.

Weaning is a stressful time for animals, so its best to take special care to make the process easier for them. Creep feeding is a suggested practice to help reduce the stress level in the kids/lambs when they are weaned early. When weaning, keep the young within their groups in familiar surroundings to reduce their stress, and then remove the dams. Be sure not to change the diets of the young two weeks before or after weaning, this would upset their system and allow the incidence of disease to set in quicker when weaning. Coccidiostats should be given to the kids/lambs in their feed, mineral, or water before and after weaning because coccidiosis is a serious concern for the young during this stressful time. If the lambs are weaned early, their first vaccination for overeating disease and tetanus should be given two weeks before weaning and then again four weeks after the first initial vaccine. Early weaned does/ewes should be fed lower quality feeds and forages to help decrease her milk production before weaning time. This helps her prevent mastitis, it is also a huge no-no to allow newly weaned mothers to graze or have access to a beautiful lush pasture, this increases the risk of getting mastitis in their udder.

Adapted from Susan Schoenian, Weaning Primer
http://www.sheepandgoat.com/articles/weaning.html
Pasture-Based Swine Management (PBSM) is an alternative approach for raising swine outdoors using pasture as a major source of nutrients, particularly for gestating sows. Compared with confinement or indoor systems for raising hogs, the PBSM approach can offer the producer lower initial costs, lower production costs, and a sustainable method for producing pork. Because these systems require no expensive buildings and waste handling equipment, farmers can feasibly down-size or expand their operation depending on prevailing market conditions.

Environmental and Social Issues
There are environmental and social issues that will continue to have an impact on confinement operations. Compared with pigs raised indoors, pasture systems significantly reduce problems associated with animal-rights groups, health of operators, and environmental concerns associated with dust, odor, and waste disposal. Pasture-based systems have a "built-in" waste management system because hogs disperse their waste over the land as they graze.

The main two ingredients in conventional swine diets are corn and soybean meal. Often, these crops are managed as continuous row-crop production using potentially ground-water contaminating pesticides and fertilizers. Grazing hogs reduces the reliance on corn and soybean production because forage crops will meet a portion of their daily nutrient needs.

Site Selection and Layout
One of the most important decisions to be made is where to locate a pasture-based system. An area of land should be chosen that is well-drained and large enough to accommodate herd size. A land requirement of four to six sows per acre is a good place to start, but if pasture is to be utilized as feed, this stocking rate may need to be decreased. The layout of paddocks will vary due to size of the herd, soil type, topography, and land area available. A minimum number of paddocks should be constructed to accommodate the different management phases (gestation, farrowing, nursery, etc.). If pastures are to be utilized, the number of paddocks will vary depending on frequency of pasture rotation. Pasture rotation will help maintain the pasture stand, nutrient quality of the pasture, and reduce damage of pasture due to rooting. Furthermore, the layout of the system will depend a lot on personal preference. A wagon-wheel design may fit the area and can lower labor needs because the distance traveled when rotating hogs among paddocks is reduced.

Fencing Options
Power or electric fencing is a low-cost alternative to conventional fencing. The low-cost and ease of installation has contributed greatly to the increased popularity of producing hogs outdoors.

High-tensile, 12.5 gauge steel wire is widely used because of its affordability and durability. A two-strand fence will suffice for most situations. However, more strands or a netting may be needed for young pigs.

Shelter and Shade
Some type of shelter should be provided during each stage of production. There are many designs available for each type of shelter. Factors to consider when selecting a shelter type include: cost, use, construction skills required, and personal preference. Adequate space for dry sows is 12 to 16 square feet per sow or boar. An individual hut should be provided for each sow during farrowing. Any of several designs can be used.

Nutrition and Feeding
Over 50% of the total cost of producing hogs is feed. Remember, no one feed ingredient can provide all the nutrients swine need on a daily basis. Although, most swine diets are based on corn and soybean meal, a wide variety of feeds exists that are suitable for hogs.

Pasture-based swine systems take advantage of the sow's excellent grazing ability to lower the cost of feeding. However, not all pastures will be suitable for sows. Pastures should be young, tender, high in protein, and low in fiber. Clovers and annual grasses such as wheat, oats, rye, and ryegrass make excellent forages for sows during the cooler months of the year. Rotationally grazing these pastures will help ensure that maximum productivity of pastures is achieved. Rotationally grazing sows helps maintain pastures at a young, tender stage of growth and helps avoid excessive trampling and rooting of pastures. Good-quality pasture can be used to replace 50% of the grain and supplement needs during gestation.
Forage Management Tips

May

- Plant warm-season perennial grasses such as common or seeded 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 overseeded 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.

Crabgrass, Pastora and other Spring Planting Considerations
Margaret A. Bell, Craven & Jones Counties

Every so often, I get the question “What’s all the hype about crabgrass? I thought it was a weed!” and the question “What do you know about Pastora? Will it kill anything I want it to?” These are very good questions and have lots of answers. Over the years, most livestock owners have acknowledged crabgrass as a weed. Now, however, we are realizing the great nutritional value it has to certain animals, especially horses. As for the new herbicide product labeled just this past fall, Pastora brings about quite the mountain of questions as well. In this article, we will discuss a few of the common misconceptions about both and discuss good planting options for the spring season.

Crabgrass has a lot of advantages. Here are some facts you need to know if you want to plant crabgrass. It is very cheap and grows well in areas that drain appropriately. For crabgrass to get its optimum growth, air temperature needs to be between 85 and 95 degrees because it is a warm season grass. It will not grow very much when the temperature is below 60 degrees. Also, warm season grasses are more tolerant to moisture stress than cool season grasses. For the coastal plain, crabgrass needs to be planted from April to May 15. Make sure you plant only about ¼ of an inch deep as crabgrass is very sensitive to how deep or shallow it is planted. You will need about 3 – 4 pounds of seed per acre.

As for Pastora, you need to do your research since it is such a new product. It is labeled for chemical weed control in hay crops and pastures in coastal bermudagrass, and suppresses large crabgrass and goosegrass, controls barnyardgrass, broadleaf signalgrass, foxtail species, johnsongrass up to 18 inches, panicum species, Italian ryegrass, sandbur, volunteer cereal grain, Pensacola bahiagrass, wild garlic, and many broadleaf weeds such as bitter sneezeweed, buttercup, geranium, chickweed, curly dock, dandelion, dog fennel, henbit, horseweed, johnsongrass, lambquarters, morning glory, pigweed, plantain, smartweed, and wild mustard. Consult with your local livestock agent for formulation amounts and how to properly apply these chemicals. Don’t forget to use a surfactant if the product calls for it. There no hay or grazing restrictions for Pastora use and it provides post grass weed control. It also provides pre and post emergent broadleaf weed control. You should only apply it to established bermudagrass pastures.

Other spring planting considerations include taking a soil sample and sending it to the NC Department of Agriculture’s lab to be analyzed. Although right now is the busy time of the year for the lab, you can always take a sample and act when you receive it. They will send you an analysis and give you recommendations based on your soil type and what you want to plant. It is important to follow the recommendations of a soil analysis to ensure you are properly preparing your pastures for planting. If you would like to learn how to take a soil sample, pick up free soil sample kits, or would like to discuss the advantages / disadvantages of crabgrass and Pastora or how to prepare your pasture for spring planting, please contact your local livestock agent.
Calendar of Events

- **Dairy Promotion Referendum - May 24th** - Dairy farmers can vote at their local Cooperative Extension office, from 8 - 5.
- **Eastern North Carolina Hay Day - June 21st at 9 am** - Hwy 33 just North of Greenville. For more information please call the Pitt County Cooperative Extension (252) 902-1700.
- **Meat Goat and Sheep Roundup - July 21st-22nd** - Lenoir County Extension Livestock arena, Kinston NC

Upcoming Youth Events

- **State 4-H Livestock Contests - June 27th - 29th** - youth learn and compete in stockman’s bowl, skillathon and livestock judging.
  - June 27th & 28th - Livestock judging
  - June 29th - Skillathon & stockman’s bowl

Recommendations for the use of agricultural 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 North Carolina Cooperative Extension nor discrimination against similar products or services not mentioned. Individuals who use agricultural 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 regulations and examine a current product label before applying any chemical. For assistance, contact your county Cooperative Extension agent.

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