

MEBANE TRACTOR

NOVEMBER 2015 MANAGEMENT TIPS

As we head into the winter months, cattle producers should take a close look at their brood cow's body condition. With the on-again, off-again droughts we experienced this summer/fall, pastures were often grazed out or severely over-grazed. With that, brood cows began to lose weight and are going into the winter with a low body condition score. If adequate nutrition is not provided for these cows, many will not make it through the winter. For those that do make it, the reproductive rate will be much lower and the calf weaning weights will also be lower. When dead cows, lower reproductive rates, and reduce calf weaning weights are added up, it adds up to **thousands** of dollars in lost income.

To prevent these losses and boost income, brood cows should be given all the hay they will consume in a 24 hour period. If the cows are in a body condition score of 4 or less or the hay is poor quality, they should be supplemented with a concentrate feed. **For about 75 cents per cow per day, cattle managers can feed the 15% Balanced Cattle Supplement formulated especially for Mebane Tractor Customers.** This is based on 5 pounds per cow per day at \$7.20 per 50 pound bag. If the cattle are thin, **don't wait** to start a program to increase body condition score. As we go into the winter feeding period and the calves get larger and consuming more milk, it will be increasingly difficult to put weight on brood cows.

HAY SUPPLIES

It appears that hay will be in a somewhat short supply this year due to the drought conditions we experienced. For those that purchase their hay supply, **it would be advisable to purchase all the hay needed for the winter feeding period now.** The winter feeding period lasts from November through March. Grass will turn green in March and start growing but it does not provide adequate growth for sustained grazing until April. Purchasing all the hay needed now will put a heavy toll on the wallet but the last thing you want to do is try to find hay in late January at the height of the winter feeding period with a short hay supply.

Here at Mebane Tractor, we have limited supplies of square-baled hay. If you need more than a few bales at a time, you can check with Lauren Langley, livestock extension agent (336-570-6740) who is developing a hay directory. In addition, the Agricultural Review has numerous listings of hay for sale.

GUARD DONKEY MANAGEMENT

With coyotes becoming permanently entrenched in our wildlife population, many cattle, sheep, and goat producers have utilized donkeys to guard their livestock. Donkeys, being direct descendants of wild asses, have a natural instinct to guard their domain. If a strange animal enters their territory, they will bite, stomp, and/or kick it death. This is great if a wild animal enters the pasture that might harm the livestock. It is not so great if it happens to be your pet dog that got lose and entered the pasture. In working with livestock producers who have guard donkeys and having some of my own, here are two important tips to keep in mind when considering a guard donkey:

1. **The donkey should have been raised with the same type of animal you want to protect.** If a donkey is placed in a cow herd and has not been raised with cows, it may see a newborn calf as a strange animal and kill it.
2. **Standard size donkeys are the preferred size for guard animals.** Donkeys come in three different sizes with considerable variance between sizes: 1) **miniature** donkeys that are less than 36 inches at the withers(shoulder); 2) **standard** size which is about the size of a pony; and 3) **mammoth** which is the size of a horse. Miniature donkeys are generally too small to fight off predator animals even though they do have guarding instincts. Mammoth donkeys, being considerably larger, eat more grass and hay which reduces the amount available for the livestock being guarded. For these two reasons, standard size donkeys are preferred.

Guard donkeys generally range with the livestock they are guarding and eat what they eat which is okay. However, in these situations, the donkey is often ignored. With that in mind, here are a few management tips:

1. **Guard donkeys should be halter broke** so they can be caught and handled without a lot of “ruckus”.
2. **Their feet should be trimmed on a regular basis.** This is the most common problem I have observed, especially with donkeys ranging with cattle. Their feet often get so out of shape that they have difficulty walking. If they have difficulty walking, how are they expected to defend the livestock against predators?! How often they need to be trimmed depends on many factors such as conformation of the donkey’s legs, terrain they are running on, weather(wet/dry), and overall health conditions. I own 5 donkeys, 4 of which I trim their feet about every 4 – 5 months, and one has had her feet trimmed only twice in her 4 year life span. This one has almost perfect leg conformation and walks over concrete several times each day.

3. Guard donkeys should, by all means, be **vaccinated against rabies!** Rabies is ever present in our area in the wildlife population and one never knows what wild animal a guard donkey encounters in protecting its domain.

4. They should also be **vaccinated against tetanus** because equines are very susceptible to tetanus. Consult your veterinarian about protection against other diseases, especially respiratory diseases, and flu. Also consult with your veterinarian about a Coggins Test. This is a test to see if Equine Infectious Anemia(EIA) is present. EIA is often fatal to equines and there is no known cure at this time. It is spread from equine to equine via blood sucking insects such as horse flies and mosquitoes.

5. **Don't allow donkeys access to livestock minerals that contain Rumensin or Bova-tech.** Rumensin is highly poisonous to equines and Bova-Tech is moderately poisonous. Rumensin or Bova-Tech is added to minerals or feed to increase feed efficiency and/or to control Coccidia.

If you have questions or need assistance in body condition scoring your livestock or need assistance in nutritional management, livestock management, etc. please contact us.

Paul Walker

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Mebane Tractor Feed and Seed