

Upcoming Calving Season Could be a Challenge

Wet, muddy conditions coupled with feed shortages could have Kentucky's cattle going into the upcoming calving season in less-than-optimal condition.

Hay supplies appear to be tight for some producers, and feed supplements have seen substantial price increases, tempting some producers to try to "rough" their cattle through the winter, said Roy Burris, beef cattle specialist with the University of Kentucky (UK) College of Agriculture.

Farmers should avoid the urge to cut back on hay or feed supplements in the coming weeks, he said. It is important to feed a balanced ration.

Because of the muddy conditions, cows' udders are muddy, and nursing calves could be susceptible to *E. coli* scours, Burris said. Additionally, cows in poor body condition due to less-than-optimal nutrition may pass on less immunity to calves. These calves may be weaker, making them even more susceptible to scours.

"If it stays warm and muddy, we have the increased scour possibility," he said. "If the calves are weaker and we have a real cold snap, then you could have calf losses, and that's what you want to guard against. This has the potential to be a tough calving season."

In at least one previous year when bad weather was coupled with feed shortages, some central Kentucky cattle producers sustained calf losses as high as 20%. Burris said he wants producers to avoid putting themselves into a situation where that could happen again.

Kentucky's spring calving season generally begins in late February; therefore, Burris said, farmers need to try to keep their cattle in good body condition with proper nutrition. Another management tool farmers can employ is to reserve a field and move cattle into it just before calving to reduce some of the excessively muddy conditions.

Cattle producers have been coping with wet, muddy conditions throughout the fall and winter. But forecasts are calling for near-normal to below-normal precipitation in the coming months.

August, September and October 2006 saw above-average precipitation, while November and December were below normal, Tom Priddy, UK meteorologist, said. From mid-December through Jan. 15, precipitation totaled 5.72 inches (in.) statewide, which was 2.14 in. above normal. Precipitation totals increased from east to west, with western

Kentucky receiving 7.74 in., central Kentucky 5.92 in., the Bluegrass 5.15 in. and eastern Kentucky 4.09 in., which was 4.04, 2.07, 1.98 and 0.47 in. above normal, respectively.

At press time, Priddy said, the 90-day outlook was calling for above-normal temperatures and below-normal precipitation.

Editor's Note: This article was written by Agriculture Communications Specialist Laura Skillman of the UK College of Agriculture, which provided the release.

