Early Season Stocker Cattle Management

Pre-grass or Receiving Management :

A critical time of any stocker cattle operator is during the first 2 to 4 weeks after the cattle arrival, provide access to good quality grass hay. Water can be withheld for the first 2 to 4 hours after arrival, however, rarely are problems seen with having water available at arrival. Let the cattle rest overnight and process them early the next morning. Working the animals in small groups will decrease the amount of stress placed on each animal. Work with your veterinarian in developing a vaccination program. The health management program may include ear-tags, deworming and vaccinating all animals with IBR, PI3, leptospirosis and blackleg. Castrate and tip the horns at arrival. Calves purchased as bulls will gain approximately 22% less than calves already castrated. Highly stressed calves may need vitamin A and B12 and treatment with long-acting antibiotic.

A coccidiostat is frequently used to alleviate coccidiosis and is usually fed for 28 days after arrival. The results of feeding antibiotics or coccidiostats are variable and are dependent on the levels of exposure to infections and stress. Feeding a coccidiostat or an antibiotic for at least 28 days is recommended for cattle bought at auctions or that have undergone moderate stress.

Spaying Heifers:

Not all feedlots will pay a premium for spayed heifers. It might be best to find a buyer willing to pay extra for service before actually spaying the heifers. Other advantages to spaying besides pregnancy prevention are:

1. Increased freedom for interstate shipment of spayed heifers.
2. Brucellosis vaccination not needed.
3. No pregnancy exam needed.
4. Heat suppressant agents need not be considered.
5. Reduced physical activity associated with heat.

Implanting :

Implanting stockers cattle will increase performance. Recent trials show that average daily gain was increased .2 pounds per day with implanting. Implants will generally increase gains more in cattle that are supplemented compared to those that are not.

Deworming

Calves are more susceptible to worms than yearlings. All calves should be dewormed. The response of yearling cattle to deworming depends on infection levels. Deworming will reduce the number of roundworms present regardless of levels of infestation.

Flies and Lice

Horn flies are usually the pest of most concern. Control commonly yields an extra 15 to 30 pounds of beef per stocker animal. When using ear tags, do not apply tags until fly season begins, approximately June 1. Dr. William Lyon, OSU Extension Entomologist, suggests you should be aware that pyrethroid-resistant horn fly populations have been documented. Organophosphate tags containing diazinon, fenthion or pirimiphos methyl should be used at least in alternate years. An even better strategy would be to rotate pyrethroid and organophosphate-impregnated ear tags with organophosphate formulations applied in dust bags, backrubbers, sprays or pour-ons. Lice should be treated when present, but is not a necessary part of a routine treatment program.

Ionophores

Ionophores such as Rumensin and Bovatec can improve daily gain in grazing cattle by allowing more energy to be produced per unit of feed consumed. Improvements in grain are about .11-.17 pound per head per day.

Salt and Minerals :

Improvements in performance may or may not occur by providing a mineral supplement. However, it is cheap insurance and worth the cost. A mineral supplement fed free-choice should contain at least 5-8% phosphorus. Protein and grain supplements will provide additional phosphorus and some trace minerals. Research from the Great Plains show that supplementing the trace minerals copper and zinc may improve animal performance. A cool, wet spring will increase the chances of grass tetany problems. The mineral supplement should contain 6-10% magnesium. A small amount of molasses or grain (approximately 5%) will improve the consumption of a mineral supplement containing a magnesium source. Ionophores increase the absorption of magnesium, phosphorus and sodium and may also help prevent grass tetany problems.

Supplementation During the Early Summer :

Supplementing stocker cattle during the early part of the grazing season has not received extensive research. This is probably because forage quality is adequate and supplementation is not thought to be needed. Cattle will, however, respond to energy and protein supplementation during the early summer. Up to 4 lbs. of corn per day can be supplemented with minimal effects on forage utilization. Additional gain per day will be approximately .4 pound per head per day. The economics of early season supplementation should be evaluated within each individual's operation. The value of added gain needs to be compared against how the extra weight affects market price and costs associated with providing the supplement.