

Upcoming Events

Food Preparation Workshop in the Sundance Courthouse Basement

September 8th: 1-4pm

Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) and Drought Management Workshop in Lusk

September 22nd : 6-8 pm

Questions?

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**Prepping Your Garden, Trees,
and Lawn for the Fall**



Preparing for Weaning

By: Alex Orozco, Extension Educator,
Crook County, University of Wyoming

Spring calving cow-calf producers are approaching weaning time, which can be a stressful time for both calves and producers. How a producer manages calves prior, during, and after weaning can have a dramatic influence on calf performance and economic viability (Justice et. al., 2021). To make weaning less stressful, it is important to create a plan that best fits your management goals and resources.

When formulating a plan, first consider whether you want to sell your calf crop or retain ownership of some or all of your calves. When deciding whether to sell or retain ownership of your calves, make sure to factor in current and future market price; current hay inventory; feed and supplementation costs; labor cost of retaining calves; space availability; and risk associated with retaining calves.

The next step is to identify the type of separation (type of weaning), if weaning weights will be collected, and if preconditioning will be implemented. During weaning, separating calves from their dams causes behavioral changes such as vocalization, walking fences, and reduced feed intake, which can result in increased stress, increased health concerns, and reduced performance (Jenkins, Griffin, and Stalker, 2015). Choose the separation method that works best for your operation while taking as many precautions as possible to reduce risk, maintain performance, and reduce illness.

Separation methods include traditional, fenceline, and two-stage weaning. Traditional weaning consists of abrupt and total separation of the cow and calf. Calves are typically moved to a new environment, such as a pasture or drylot, often resulting in high amount of stress as cows and calves search for one another. Calves and cows may engage in

fence walking and vocalization that can last up to 3 days (Justice et. al., 2021; Jenkins, Griffin, and Stalker, 2015).

Fenceline weaning is when cows and calves are placed on opposite sides of a fence. Fenceline weaning usually takes 5–7 days but it has shown to be a less stressful practice that results in fewer vocalizations, less fence walking, and more weight gain postweaning compared to traditional weaning of calves.

For best results, you need to have a tight fenceline and ensure that adjacent pastures share a fence long enough for the cows and calves to spread out and maintain relatively close physical proximity. The cows should be removed from the pasture that the pairs were occupying so that the calves can stay in the familiar pasture. Doing this will reduce the stress on calves since they are accustomed to the watering and feeding location. Note that this practice requires fencing that is in good condition and reinforced so that calves and cows cannot get through to the other side.

Two-stage weaning is a third option to consider. In stage one, a nose flap/nose piece (often referred to as weaner) is placed in the nose of the calf (see Figure 1 below). This device allows calves to graze grass and drink water, but it does not allow them to nurse. Two-stage weaning is less stressful than traditional weaning because it allows calves to stay with their dams while adjusting to not having milk. Stage one usually lasts 10–14 days.

In stage two, the nose piece comes off and the cows and calves are separated like in traditional weaning. However, because calves were by their dams while being weaned, separation is less stressful and will result in less vocalization and fence walking than traditional weaning. Before implementing this practice, producers should consider the extra days it takes for calves to be weaned, the added cost of nose pieces (even though they are reusable), and the added labor required to bring calves through the chute to install and remove the nose piece.

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Figure 1: Image shows calf with a nose flapper/piece (weaner). Image was taken from Heather Smith Thomas's article "Weaning Calves with Nose Flaps," published in the Angus Beef Bulletin.

No matter what weaning strategy you choose, there are additional management strategies to reduce stress on weaned calves. Preconditioning, proper vaccination protocol, clean water, high nutritional forage, and fly control are all practices that reduce a calf's stress and encourage better performance.

Effective preconditioning programs help calves become accustomed to being weaned off. Calves are usually preconditioned for at least 45 days prior to them being sold. Preconditioning is designed to reduce stress that occurs during the transitional period between weaning and going on feed or moving into the next production cycle. This management practice is intended to optimize the calf's immune system and nutritional status while reducing stress (Lalman and Mourer, 2017). When done properly, preconditioning is the best program available for preventing shipping fever and bovine respiratory disease (BRD) while improving weight gains and potentially obtaining a premium on your

calves (Bremer, 2015). Calves that have been effectively preconditioned increase their value by promoting calf growth, enhancing immune system function, and minimizing calf stress (Parish, Rhinehart, and Boland, 2017). Effective preconditioning also allows producers to build a reputation for high-quality cattle.

A good preconditioning program focuses on three major areas:

- **Immunization against disease:** A successful preconditioning program must include a proper vaccination program. This is essential to reducing the risk of diseases. Please consult a local vet to establish a vaccination protocol that best suits your operation and herd. Additionally, a proper fly control program not only reduces stress on the calves but is also important in managing livestock health and performance.
- **Management:** A proper preconditioning program requires good management, including additional labor to ensure that calves are feed bunk broke, healthy, and gaining weight.
- **Proper nutrition:** During preconditioning, it is critical that calves are fed high quality feed that is balanced for energy, protein, minerals, and vitamins while meeting their nutritional requirements to reduce stress and increase weight gain. It is also important that calves are provided with clean water, preferably in a trough so that they get acquainted with this type of water source. Calves usually experience shrinkage associated with weaning, but with proper nutrition they can gain 30–50lbs during a 30-day preconditioning program.

Ensuring that the three major areas of a preconditioning programs are met requires extra resources, including labor, vaccinations, death loss, additional feed costs, and interest expenses on borrowed money. Two additional factors to consider are the seasonal patterns of the cattle market and the price slide on increased calf weights. Therefore, before you decide to precondition your calves, consider the following.

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1. Can you afford the added cost?
2. Seasonal patterns of the cattle market
 - a. Current market price vs. future market price for heavier calves
3. Do you have the proper additional resources?
 - a. Labor
 - b. Feed
 - c. Facilities
4. How will a 45-day retention to precondition their calves affect your grazing plan?

In summary, weaning can be a stressful time for your herd, but there are a variety of strategies that can mitigate the stress your calves experience before and after weaning. It is important that calves are handled with as little stress as possible so as to encourage good performance and reduce the chances of health issues. Before weaning, evaluate your goals and resources to determine a weaning strategy that works best for your operation. Also, carefully consider the pros and cons of a preconditioning program before to deciding to precondition your calves.

Sources for Further Reading on Preparing for Weaning

Bremer. M., 2015. Preconditioning Calves: Can it Add Value? University of Nebraska Lincoln. UNL Beef. <https://beef.unl.edu/preconditioning-calves-can-it-add-value>

Jenkins. K.H., Griffin. D., and Stalker. A., 2015. Management, Health, and Nutritional Considerations for Weaning Calves. University of Nebraska Lincoln. UNL Beef. <https://beef.unl.edu/management-health-and-nutritional-considerations-weaning-calves>

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Lalman. D., and Mourer. G., 2017. Effects of Preconditioning on Health, Performance and Prices of Weaned Calves. Oklahoma State University. Oklahoma Cooperative Extension. <https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/print-publications/afs/effects-of-preconditioning-on-health-performance-and-prices-of-weaned-calves-afs-3529.pdf>

Parish. J.A., Rhinehart. J. D., and Boland. H.T., 2017. Beef Calf Preconditioning Programs. Mississippi State University Extension. <https://extension.msstate.edu/sites/default/files/publications/publications/p2578.pdf>

Prepping Your Garden, Trees, and Lawn for the Fall

By: Alex Orozco, Extension Educator,
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As harvest time approaches, it is important to keep checking for bugs that may be affecting production in your garden. When the gardening season draws to a close, it's time to prepare your garden, trees, and lawn for the winter and fall months.

Garden

Once harvest is completed, it's time to start removing diseased plants. While you can leave healthy plants there to rot and add nutrients and protection to the soil, leaving plants that have signs of a disease can cause diseases, pests, and fungus to be introduced into your soil. Invasive weeds should also be removed to reduce the amount of weeds come spring.

One of the important things to do when preparing your garden for the fall is to cover your garden with mulch before it freezes. Covering your garden with mulch can help prevent weeds from germinating in the fall while also protecting your soil. It can also be beneficial to hydrate your soil before adding a layer of mulch, as this allows the moisture to be held in your soil.

Covering your garden with cloth can help protect it from cold temperatures. However, don't leave it covered for more than 2–3 days, especially when temperatures are warm, since photosynthesis doesn't occur when it's covered.

Another important thing to do when wrapping up gardening season is to put away your tools in a good shape. Make sure to clean, sharpen, and

oil your tools so that they are sharp, disease free, and winter well. This allows them to be ready for next year.

Trees

Tree care in the fall and winter is not to be underestimated. Removing broken ends and doing cleanup cuts where branches broke up helps prevent bacteria and diseases from forming.

Additionally, it is important that we use mulch, whether organic (dry grass clippings, leaf litter, pine straw/needles, chipped bark, etc.) or inorganic (rocks, gravel, etc.), around the trees. When choosing a mulch, choose something that works well for you, your plants, and your environment. Inorganic mulches don't regulate heat well so it is important to plant species that can tolerate the heat when using inorganic mulches. Finer (chipped) organic mulches can blow away more easily than shredded organic mulches. Do not over-apply shredded mulches as they can prevent water from being absorbed by the roots.

It is important to water your trees even in the winter, especially if you do not have a lot of precipitation via snow. Trees such as evergreens (spruces, pines, etc.) can be damaged by warm, dry conditions because they hold their leaves and still lose moisture through their needles. These trees are the ones that need to be soaked with water. The best way to soak these trees is to water the whole root zone rather than just by the trunk.

Only water your trees when the ground isn't frozen (otherwise you'll encounter poor absorption and high runoff). To test if the soil is thawed enough, stick a screwdriver into the ground; if it goes 6–12 inches easily, the soil profile has enough room to be watered. Make sure to test the screwdriver method in several locations.

Additionally, only water when its 45° F or higher outside. Don't overwater, but keep in mind that younger trees (1-5 years old) need more water than the older trees.

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Lawn

There are several things you can do to prepare your lawn for the colder months and prevent potential issues. One of the issues you want to avoid is getting snow mold on your lawn. Snow mold occurs when snow sits on the lawn (or parts of the lawn) for longer periods of time. This can cause a fungus to form that will eat the grass plants. Therefore, if you are considering fertilizing your lawn, it is important to apply fertilizer by September 15th. If you miss the September 15th deadline, it is better to wait until the spring because a late application can flesh new growth to your lawn that can be susceptible to the fungus caused by snow mold. Another practice to reduce the chances of snow mold is by mowing your lawn one last time at the lowest level your lawnmower allows.

During fall, leaves may start to build up on your lawn. Dry leaves that aren't thick can be mulched with a lawnmower. However, wet leaves or leaves that are thick and/or have been matted down should be raked up and removed. These leaves can suffocate or invite diseases to your lawn. Additionally, make sure to remove any fallen branches from the lawn.

If your lawn currently has perennial weeds, weed control shouldn't be ignored. Applying herbicides in the fall and manually removing these weeds can help reduce the amount of weeds that come back in the spring. Don't forget about weed control when prepping your lawn for the fall and winter months!

Summary

As the gardening season comes to an end, it's time to prepare our garden, trees, and lawns for the colder months. Taking precautions to reduce the chances for diseases in our gardens, trees, and lawns will help them thrive during the next growing season. A good weed control program will reduce the amount of weeds in our gardens and lawns next spring.

Sources for Further Information on Prepping Your Garden, Trees, and Lawn for the Fall

Hoffman. D., Edwards. J., and Vardiman. J., 2020. Wrapping up the gardening season. Barnyards and Backyards Wyoming. <https://youtu.be/ck5O2zxNyEU>

Seiler. A., Edwards. J., and Vardiman. J., 2021. Don't neglect your trees! Winter care, spring planting and more. Barnyards and Backyards Wyoming. <https://youtu.be/WQhlNVDaKT8>

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