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COW SENSE CHRONICLE

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WINTERIZING THE COW HERD

Welcome to fall! I keep hearing reminders about winterizing things, from my lawn to my house. This might be a good time for a brief checklist to consider when winterizing the cow herd after weaning!

- Critically evaluate cow body condition. Are there thin cows who might benefit from being sorted off and run for a time with the young cows? The post-weaning 2nd trimester time period is when nutrient requirements are lowest. Putting weight on thin cows is least expensive and most efficient at this time.
- Speaking of body condition, you might take a look at your herd bulls. Mature bulls might be able to get by on an all-forage diet, but young bulls should be around 75% of their mature body weight by the time they are 2. Winter pasture with appropriate shelter and/or bedding is critical for protecting important bull body parts!
- Consider your fall grass situation. Will protein supplementation be necessary?
- Fall is a great time for parasite control. Contact your veterinarian if you have questions about what products to use or changing up your protocols to reduce resistance.
- Did you use fly tags this summer? Remove them at the same time as you pregnancy check and/or administer parasite control products.
- Evaluate your culling policy. Are you keeping cows that aren't paying for themselves? Hopefully pregnancy status goes without saying, but open cows should head down the road. Soundness, age/teeth, udder structure, and calf quality are all important to consider as well.
- If you raise your own replacement heifers, consider their development program. Are you satisfied with the approach you've been taking, or would you like different results from your heifer development program?
- Test hay for nutrient analysis and build a winter feeding plan. Do you need to purchase supplement? Does your high-protein second cutting need to be diluted with a lower quality hay to more optimally match cow requirements? Do you have enough hay? Does your grain hay have a cautionary level of nitrates? If so, do you have a feeding plan to avoid nitrate toxicity problems?
- Are you happy with your mineral supplementation program? Adding a mineral panel to those hay tests might help to know more about mineral intake - and don't forget the minerals in water!