

Confined Cow Calf Operations

This topic seems to be getting a lot more interest lately. There have been some articles in the farm press highlighting some producers around Kansas that are giving this a try. The main reason, is the lack of pasture, lack of expansion opportunities and weather!

Next week I will be visiting some of these operations to interview them and take some virtual tours to share at the Beef Issues Group meeting later in the month.

I'm teaming up with Will Boyer our Water Quality Specialist to discuss these operations and Will has a drone that we can get some cool overhead shots! This should be fun!

If you'd like to see what we come up with, join us for the Beef Issues Group meeting on February 28th at 7 pm at the Glacial Hills Resource center, 913 Dakota in Sabetha.

So just a few things about confined raising cows with their calves. Cows require between 125 and 700 square feet of pen space. Smaller cows weighing 1000 to 1200 pounds can get by with 125 square feet in dry conditions and 250 square feet during wet conditions. Keeping pairs together requires more pen space. Start with a minimum of 400 square feet per pair in lots that are dry and add space as calves grow. Regardless of feeder or bunk type, each cow needs 24 to 30 inches of bunk space, horned cattle need even more. Fences should be sturdy enough to withstand a mature cow rubbing and reaching under the fence for grass.

Regardless of facilities, water is the main concern because it is the number one nutrient for cattle. Each cow consumes 15 to 20 gallons per day. You must be able to provide a continuous supply of water for the number of animals in the pen. During the summer, water consumption usually peaks in early afternoon.

If using dry lots, portable bunks can be added to provide enough space. Shade has to be provided to minimize heat stress. Plan on 20 to 25 square feet of shade per head, place the shade in the middle of the pen for continuous protection throughout the day.

Cattle should be sorted into uniform groups by weight, size, age or body condition. Age is important so the bossy older cows won't intimidate younger cows. Sorting by body condition score enables you to offer different diets based on the goal of increasing, decreasing or maintaining body condition. Sorting increases the efficiency of the operation.

Feeding programs can be limit fed, or full fed. I'm excited to learn more about confined cow/calf operations and how they are working. I will be visiting three different operations that are using Hoop buildings and outside lots. Stay tuned!