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Supplemental feed for calves prior to weaning

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Supplemental Feed for Calves Prior to Weaning

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Summary

A mixture of 60% dehydrated alfalfa crumbles and 40% dry rolled sorghum grain was fed ad lib to calves 30 days before weaning. The calves ate an average of 2.6 lbs. per day and gained 0.32 lbs. more per day average during the 30 days than calves receiving no supplemental feed. During the next 30 days all calves received the ration ad lib. Calves continuing on the ration gained 0.48 lbs. more per day average than those that had received no supplement before weaning.

Introduction

Changing diet from milk and grass to other feeds imposes stresses on calves at weaning. Could the stresses be reduced by introducing post-weaning feed to calves before weaning? We attempted to find the answer to that question.

Experimental Procedure

Seventy-two Polled Hereford cows with spring calves were divided into Groups A and B to graze native bluestem range. Thirty days before weaning date, creep feeders were placed in the pastures with Group A. Thirty-two calves had access to the feeders, which contained a ration of 60% crumbled dehydrated alfalfa and 40% dry-rolled sorghum grain with soybean oil added as needed to reduce dustiness.

After weaning (October 21, 1972) the calves were kept in their respective groups, put into drylots, and both groups were fed the ration free choice thirty (30) days.

Weights were taken at the start of the trial, weaning, and 30 days after weaning.

Results and Discussion

The first 30 days of the trial (just before weaning) Group A ate 2.60 lbs. (average) of the creep ration per head per day. The next 30 days (after weaning) Group A averaged 11.2 lbs. of feed per head per day compared with 10.5 lbs. average for Group B.

Group A averaged 75.0 lbs. average per head (1.25 lbs. ADG) for the 60 days compared with 48.0 lbs. average (0.80 lbs. ADG) for Group B. Gain on pasture before weaning by Group A was 55.31 lbs. per head (1.84 lbs. ADG) compared with 45.6 lbs. per head (1.52 lbs. ADG) for Group B. The difference in gains was large the 30 days in drylot after weaning. Calves in Group A gained

an average of 26.1 lbs per head (0.92 lbs. ADG); those in Group B, an average of 13.2 lbs. per head (0.44 lbs ADG).

Gains in the first 30 days did not differ significantly but gains for Group A were significantly (P .05) higher for both the 30 days in the drylot and the entire 60-day period.