

Grazing Stockers and Preconditioning Calves

Objectives:

Stocker operations and calf preconditioning programs strive to maximize beef production utilizing grass. For most operators, it is very important to know if your average daily gain is enough to make it pay. While the NIRS/NUTBAL system cannot make your decisions for you, it can provide valuable information telling you what is happening NOW.

Goals:

Your nutrition-related goals could include 2lbs daily gain or an end weight of 750lbs by a certain date, for example.

Protocol:

A successful nutritional monitoring program for stockers or for preconditioning young animals starts by:

- ◆ determining what you want to accomplish
- ◆ identifying forage resources
- ◆ deciding how long you are going to keep the animals.

Then, establish a timeline for collecting samples.

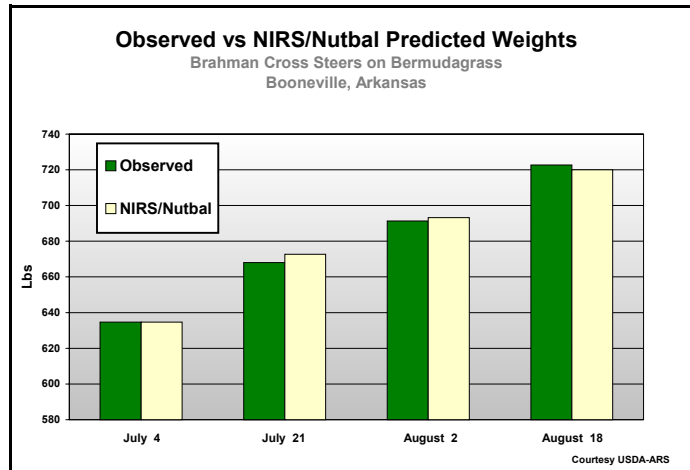
So far we have suggested sampling cows once a month in order to hit a fairly broad performance target. But in this case, your target or goals are very specific and usually have opportunity costs associated with poor gains.

Therefore when you are developing a timeline for collecting samples, consider:

- ◆ The higher the grazing pressure, the faster forage quality and quantity will change. (Affects the time lapse between sampling.)
- ◆ The more data points or sample results you have for a period, the better you can manage for specific goals. (Affects how often you sample from beginning to end.)
- ◆ Extreme weather changes impact forage quality and growth as well as animal productivity. (You may want to take an extra sample not in your original plan in order to capture the effects of this type of event.)

For example, you are preconditioning 500 steers for 50 days at a high stocking rate on improved pasture in a drought prone

region. You calculate an average daily gain of 1.75lbs is needed to break even. Thus, taking a sample every 2 or 3 weeks may work better than monthly sampling.



Graph 1: Steer Trial. Brahman Cross steers grazed on bermuda. End weights predicted by NUTBAL deviated less than 1% from actual.

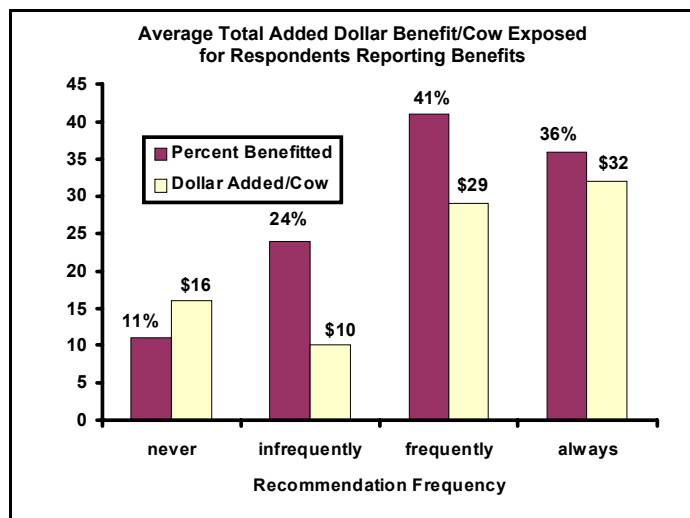
As with other animal classes discussed so far, use the forage quality results and animal performance report generated from the manure sample to help you make various management decisions between sampling.

Benefit:

The major benefit of monitoring the nutritional status of stockers is the ability to monitor or track weight gain. Weight gain decides your profit.

Two skills that enhance your monitoring program...

- ◆ Body Condition Scoring
- ◆ Estimating Forage Standing Crop



Graph 2: Client Survey. Results indicate that producers collecting samples and receiving NUTBAL advisories monthly realize \$36 additional revenue on average per exposed cow. This survey was conducted over a variety of management types and herd sizes nationwide.