

Nutrition and Management of Heifers and Young Cows on Bar L Ranch

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Bar L Ranch
Marianna, Florida

Bar L Ranch is a cow–calf operation located in Marianna, Florida, that retains 160 heifers each year for replacement purposes. The remaining calf crop is shipped each year to Tri-State Cattle Feeders in Hereford, Texas, for finishing in a retained ownership program.

In mid-August, all steer and heifer calves are weaned, vaccinated, and pre-conditioned together. Before shipment to the feedlot, steers and heifers are separated and the top-end heifers are selected for replacements. They are branded, tagged, and weighed to determine the nutritional program needed for adequate daily weight gain to reach breeding weight by January 1. They are returned to the best-quality pasture available in the fall of the year and are supplemented with chicken litter and corn or soyhulls. As grazing diminishes, free-choice bermudagrass hay is fed as well as litter mix.

In early January, heifers are synchronized and bred by AI to Brangus bulls. Semen is provided by Hardee Farms and Helton Ranch, in return for carcass and performance data on the AI-sired steer calves. After AI is completed, clean-up bulls are used for 60 days after which time the heifers are palpated and any open heifers are sold as open

heifers or bred later and sold as bred heifers. In either case, if a heifer does not breed within the 60 days, she is not kept as a replacement.

The heifers remain separated from the mature cow herd and, prior to calving, heifers are moved into the heifer calving area near corrals for convenient observation and working in the event that they require assistance calving. As heifers calve, they are removed from the calving herd on a weekly basis and put in pasture designated for first- and second-calf cows. Their diet is free-choice hay and a chicken litter–soyhull mix consisting of 12 lb litter and 5 lb soyhulls per head daily. When ryegrass interseeded into permanent pasture is adequate, the first-calf heifers and second-calf cows are control-grazed 2 to 3 hours per day until grass is adequate for full-time grazing, at which time hay and litter mix is discontinued.

The calves of first-calf heifers are weaned at 6 to 7 months of age to give heifers an opportunity to recoup and birth their second calf. The heifer remains separate from the adult herd until she has weaned her second calf, at which time she is moved to the adult herd for the duration of her stay at Bar L Ranch.

NOTES: