

Mount 'n Cattle

Article for the Wyoming Livestock Roundup

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Who's this Mount guy and what is the Sandhills Calving System?

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It is a great honor to have the opportunity to write a monthly column in the *Wyoming Livestock Roundup*. I hope to share with you quality, research-based information on improving profitability in ranching.

You'll find out quickly my biases and experiences lean to a low-cost, low-input livestock production system. This isn't to lessen the importance of production, but I think the industry has been so focused on improving production the past several decades that we increased costs of production and our exposure to production and market risk so much that we narrowed profit margins.

So who am I and what is my experience? For the last five years, I've been a University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service livestock educator in Wheatland working in Platte, Goshen, and Laramie counties. I grew up the son of a Methodist pastor and moved around quite a bit, so I claim Wheatland as my home – much to the town's disappointment I'm sure!

I became interested in ranching while finishing high school in Utah. I attended Colorado State University, where I received my bachelor's and master's degrees in animal science but got my real education working for various ranches in the area.

I worked for Adrian Weaver on the ranch north of Fort Collins, Colo., and Tie Siding for various times throughout my time at CSU. I spent a summer on Baller's Ranch in Walden, Colo., fencing, haying, and chasing yearlings through beautiful North Park. I also spent a year as a pen rider at Horton Feedlot north of Wellington, Colo. Working for these extremely varied operations gave me great opportunities for experience and helped frame my perspective on the industry.

The last five years working as an extension educator has also been valuable. I am consistently impressed with the livestock producers I've had the privilege to work with, and I'm constantly learning from these producers how to make ranching more profitable and enjoyable.

Take my advice and perspectives for what they are worth. I promise to be honest, present new ideas and perspectives, and try to be right – but don't count on that last one.

The Sandhills Calving System

Have you heard of the Sandhills Calving System? I hadn't until I was visiting Mannie, manager of the Y-Cross Ranch near Horse Creek north west of Cheyenne. I went back to the office and researched this and was impressed with the concept and

results. The Sandhills Calving System was developed in the Sandhills of Nebraska working with two good-sized ranches as case studies. Credit for the research goes to Dr. David Smith and his colleagues at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The goal of the Sandhills Calving System is to reduce calf scour incidence, calf deaths, and the associated treatment costs. The system moves heavy cows to new pastures before they calve so newborn calves are not exposed to the pathogen and to prevent transmission of the pathogen from older calves to newborns.

The results are outstanding. In case herd No. 1, an 800-cow herd, calf-death loss was between 6 and 14 percent during the five years prior to adoption of the system, and the ranch averaged \$3,114 in treatment costs per season. In the five years after adoption of the system, no calves were lost due to scours. Only four calves were treated for scours the first year, and no calves have been treated since. The owner estimated a savings of \$40,000 to \$50,000 per year due to more live calves at weaning, better calf performance and reduced treatment costs. Case herd No. 2, a 400 cow herd, saw similar improvements.

The system requires that several pastures be available at calving time, depending on the length of a calving season. Start with heavy cows in pasture 1 then, after two weeks, move the cows that haven't calved into pasture 2, leaving the cows with calves in pasture 1. After one week calving in pasture 2, move the heavy cows into pasture 3 and so on. Cows and calves can be combined after the calves are 4 weeks old, when a calf's susceptibility to scours is reduced and its ability to fight the disease is better.

One added benefit besides reducing calf scours is that pregnant cows are easier to move than pairs!

This system may not come easy. Availability of pastures, shelter, water and other facilities may determine if this will work for you. Remember – keep it simple and always consider the cost of labor, equipment and feed in any decision you make.

More information on the Sandhills Calving System can be found on the Web at <http://www.rangebeefcow.com/speakers/presentations/Smith.pdf>.