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For Immediate Release

IMPROVING WINTER MANAGEMENT CAN IMPROVE HERD AND CALF HEALTH
Baby Calf Health Directly Linked to Clean Calving Environment

Hanover, Ks. - Improving winter-feeding conditions, reducing winter-feed costs, and maintaining herd health, especially at calving time, were topics at the recent "Improving Livestock Production Workshop" in Hanover. Thirty-nine people gathered at the Kloppenberg Community Center for the workshop sponsored by the Tuttle Creek WRAPS to learn more about how to improve herd productivity and profitability.

Barbara Donovan, Tuttle Creek WRAPS (Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy) Coordinator, presented a slide show educating the group about the Tuttle Creek Watershed being a top priority in the state of Kansas. WRAPS is a voluntary grass roots program working with local participants to build awareness while identifying remedies using Best Management Practices (BMPs.) The long term goals are to protect and restore water quality and storage. Additionally, WRAPS goals are to preserve and enhance wildlife habitat, control flooding, and protect the productivity of agricultural lands.

Tuttle Creek WRAPS Watershed, along with other state and federal conservation programs, has cost-share available to help producers adopt management practices to address water quality problems. Gary Satter, Executive Director of Glacial Hills RC & D, described programs with funding available for qualified livestock producers and cropland farmers. Contact information is listed below. Other presentations focused on what some of those management practices might be.

Dr. Larry Hollis, Kansas State University Extension Beef Veterinarian, focused on winter feed, feeding site management, and ways to improve herd health at calving time. "Producers need to keep their cows in good shape during the winter prior to calving to give the calf the best chance at arriving healthy and performing well throughout its life cycle," he explained. Good quality hay should be eaten and poor quality hay should be used for something else.

Ideally hay is best fed unrolled on a clean area daily in the amount that the cows need and will clean up in 2-3 hours, Hollis told the group. The hay should be unrolled on standing dormant leftover grass. The cows will eat all of the unrolled hay and the dormant grass, rest, and then scatter the manure when they move to another location or go to drink. "This can keep the manure, nutrients and bacteria out of the creek; it's healthier for the calves, and good for the watershed, but," he acknowledged, " it is more work for the farmer versus dropping bales in round bale feeders close to the homestead."

"Round bale feeders are a blessing or a curse depending how they are managed," Hollis warned. The design, spacing and angle of bars determine how much feed is wasted using hay rings. In a study done in Michigan the most efficient hay feeder was a round feeder with an upper cone holding the bale so that hay pulled out was then caught in the lower ring and consumed; the next most efficient was a ring that was solid on both the bottom and upper rim with angled middle bars. A trailer with angle bars and bunks to catch the loose falling hay was third, with the rounded cradle type feeder being the most wasteful.

The number one cause of calf mortality is diarrhea or calf scours. Contributing pathogens are virus, bacteria, salmonella, clostridium, and cryptosporidium. Within every herd are carrier cows that transmit these viral diseases every year. Newborn calves must receive an adequate amount of colostrum within twelve hours of birth to receive the protection needed to fight off disease until they start building their own immunity. Hollis explained that humans transfer antibodies to the embryo through the placenta as well as in the colostrum, but in cattle there is no cross-placental transfer of antibodies. An 80# calf needs to consume one gallon of colostrum, ideally having its first drink within two hours of its birth. Within 24 hours the gut wall closes, and then, no more can be absorbed. If the calf is slow to nurse, the caretaker should either milk the cow or use alternative colostrum to feed the calf.

Hollis noted that the best colostrum is from the cows within the operation because they produce the antibodies from that farm. If there is a cow within the herd that gives more colostrum than her calf needs, Hollis suggests milking her and freezing that colostrum to use for another calf later. The protection from colostrum lasts about nine weeks. Research has shown that calves receiving inadequate colostrum have decreased performance throughout their life cycle. When weaned they are more likely to get sick, more likely to die, and gain less weight than their counterparts.

Spreading cattle out over a larger area lessens the concentration of disease producing organisms that young calves are exposed to. It is critical to keep calves in a clean environment-- the bigger the calving area and the cleaner the ground, the less the concentration of bad organisms.

Research in the Sand Hills of Nebraska has developed a successful calving system that keeps the newborn calves away from the older calves. This system requires eight different calving areas, fenced with gates and water. At the end of each week, the pregnant cows are moved into the next cell away from the cows with calves. This happens each week with the cows with calves staying in the cell they calved in. By keeping all of the calves of the same birth

week batched together the following things happen: 1) Carrier cows that exist in each herd are more spread out. 2) Older calves are disease amplifiers; by leaving age groups together the immunity of the younger calves is much less compromised. 3) This system reduces and practically eliminates scours regardless of which organism is causing the outbreak. 4) The number of calves affected will be minimized.

"Feeding-site management can have a direct effect on newborn calf health." Hollis concluded. "Pick the management option that works best for you. With calf scours organisms, 'dilution is the solution to the pollution'. "

"Low-cost or no-cost" management options were the topic for Dale Kirkham, a cow-calf producer in Greenwood County as well as a Clean Water Farms-Field Organizer for the Kansas Rural Center. Kirkham challenged cattlemen in the audience to have their cattle working for them instead of the other way around. "Cattle have four legs, a mouth and rumen for a reason," Dale told the audience. Cattle can move around the pasture to eat thus helping distribute the manure and nutrients. They do not need all of their feed hauled to them to perform well.

If pastures are managed properly in the summer, Kirkham pointed out, there will be dormant grass for use during the winter. Hay can be unrolled in a different area each day on standing grass reducing the negative impact of feeding in the same spot every day. By offering some additional protein, the cow's nutritional needs are met. Also, herd health is better when cattle are not confined in a small area for the winter. If cattle are fed the same time of day in the same place, they will soon be waiting at the gate for their daily handout. Owners can train them otherwise.

A safe source of water needs to be offered during the winter. "Ask anyone who has ever had cattle drown from an ice break or needed to rescue cattle from icy water," stated Kirkham. Storm conditions can prevent chopping ice, or snow can cover the pond and cattle break thru the ice before they realize.

By strategically placing salt and mineral, grazing distribution will improve, leading to improved range conditions. Pasture rotation allows the grass to rest; the grass plants become healthier and heal the land. During the summer cattle should be encouraged to stay out of ponds and streams to reduce loafing in fragile riparian areas. As cattle enter the streams and ponds they take sediment and bacteria into the water with them, thus lessening the life of the pond and damaging the banks. Research has shown that if off stream watering sites are offered to cattle, they will spend less time drinking and loafing in the riparian area. Performance will often improve when the cattle are offered an unlimited supply of good clean water to drink.

"Producers must play the hand that they are dealt," Dale concluded. "Each of us needs to look at our operation, the decisions we make and the activities that we do. Are we making a positive impact or a negative one? We have the ability to make a difference!"

Interested producers should contact their USDA Service Center for the
Natural Resources Conservation Services & Conservation District.
Washington Co. 785-325-2321 Ext.3
Marshall Co. 785-562-5343 Ext. 3
Riley Co. 785-776-7582 Ext. 3
Glacial Hills RC & D 785-945-6292
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