TIPS FOR WINTER GRAZING ON CROPS

1. Exclude stock from waterways and create an ungrazed buffer zone between livestock and the waterway.
2. Leave an ungrazed buffer zone around Critical Source Areas (parts of the paddock that can channel overland flow directly to waterways).
3. Graze paddocks strategically — on a sloping paddock, fence across the slope and start grazing at the top so the standing crop acts as a filter.
4. Make breaks "long and narrow".
5. Regularly back-fence to minimise pugging damage and runoff risk.
6. Place troughs and supplementary feed in a dry central part of the paddock.
7. Provide adequate feed, shelter and clean, fresh drinking water for your stock.
8. When the soil is not so wet, graze the buffer strips around Critical Source Areas quickly and lightly.
9. Consider planting a catch crop, such as greenfeed oats, to reduce nitrogen losses.
10. When choosing paddocks for next year's winter feed crop, think about how you can improve your management of CSAs and waterways.

Doubts on value of yard weaning

WORDS: ANDREW SWALLOW

Benefits of yard weaning are transient and more about short-term management than long-term weight or other gains, judging by recently published Massey University research and further work pending publication.

The findings run contrary to some commonly held views about the practice and suggest a Beef + Lamb New Zealand factsheet on the practice may need revising.

"We found yard weaning isn't a benefit for growth rate," Rebecca Hickson says. She was the corresponding author for a paper published in the 2017 Proceedings of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production (see panel).

"We were not able to show a growth-rate advantage, but it was useful in that it allowed us to quickly identify a small number of calves that were much more highly strung."

Such calves can affect the growth rate of a mob, be a danger in yards, and affect eating quality of their peers come slaughter, Hickson says.

Identifying them during a week's yard-weaning means they can be removed and culled or managed separately, she suggests.

The 2017 NZSAP paper concludes "yard-weaned calves lost less weight, tended to be less behaviourally reactive and had lower heart rates during testing than did paddock-weaned calves after seven days of treatment.

However, these benefits did not persist until 42 days post-weaning."

As such, the practice may be beneficial for breeders selling calves shortly after weaning, both in weight and presentation, but for those taking calves through to heavier weights before sale there appears little to gain.

Hickson says the temporary reduced weight loss in the yard-weaned calves may be because they were always just a few metres from their baleage feed, and could not pace the fence line or camp in a corner as their counterparts in the paddock did. That was despite the dams being removed so they were totally out of sight and hearing for all treatment groups even in the dead of night.

"We took the mums miles away!"

Another factor to consider is that the yard-weaned calves faced two feed changes in the trial, from grass and milk, to baleage and then to grass only, whereas

TRIAL DETAIL

The first year of the Massey trial was with 63 Charolais-sired calves on the university's Tuapaka Farm. Maternal breeds were Angus, Angus-Friesian, Angus-Kiwicross and Angus-Jersey, with the resulting calves split into four mobs balanced for sex, breed, liveweight and initial temperament at weaning. Mean weight and age was 272 kg and 199 days.

Two mobs were put out to grass, while two were given ad-lib baleage in holding yards for a week prior to turnout. See www.nzsp.org.nz for full details in the 2017 paper by Ramsay et al. The effect of yard weaning and contact with humans on behavioural reactivity and liveweight gain of beef breed calves.
the paddock-weaned groups simply went from grass and milk to grass only. Arguably, that would have disadvantaged the yard-weaned calves, Hickson says, especially as they were turned out to join the paddock-weaned mobs at the end of the first week, so had a second change of surroundings which the paddock-weaned calves did not.

A continuation of the trial for a second year found similar, albeit yet to be published, results to those in the 2017 NZSAP paper, Hickson says, even though the calves were much “wilder” having never been handled as calves at foot, compared to four yards prior to weaning for the first-year mobs.

“The take-home message from both years is that there’s not a lot to be gained from yard-weaning in growth rate or subsequent temperament.”

That said, the yard-weaned calves in the trial were manually fed and had a person move around in their pen each day, but were not walked through races or other handling facilities to familiarise them with those activities with a view to easing future management, as some breeders do with their young stock, Hickson says. Also, none of the wilder calves in the second-year trial escaped the yards in the first week post-weaning, whereas a few of their paddock-weaned counterparts did. Yard-weaning also reduced subsequent walking of fence lines and camping in one spot, which could result in pasture damage.

Liveweight gain (kg/d) response to weaning practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Weaning to day 7</th>
<th>Day 7 to day 42</th>
<th>Weaning to day 42</th>
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<tr>
<td>Yard-weaned</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
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<td>Paddock weaned with daily human interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paddock weaned with minimal human contact</td>
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* B+LNZ factsheet no.99

**KEEP THEM TIGHT**

A First consultant Peter Andrew, who helped put together Beef + Lamb NZ’s Factsheet on yard weaning, welcomes Massey’s efforts to put some local data behind the practice.

His advice to those using it, or trialling it, is to wean into mobs of 70-100 that are tightly confined, particularly for the first couple of days of what should be at least a five-day period.

“Tight as you can but still comfortable to lie down.”

About one calf per four square metres is a good guideline which can be tweaked up or down depending on the weight of the calves.

“Walk through twice a day, check the water and have the water trough well away from the feed.”

Two high-quality feeds should be available ad-lib. “Lucerne silage is a favourite.”

In the Gisborne-Wairoa area where he operates most farmers who yard-wean do it for improved behavioural reasons, a “once-in-a-lifetime chance to socialise” for the calves. Any weight gain advantage is small and typically viewed as a bonus rather than the objective.

“A farmer who yard-weans 1450 calves feels the difference in the cattle behaviour is like night and day. Some have suggested that it could be a health and safety requirement.”

Early adopters tended to be smaller-scale operations but uptake’s expanding on larger properties with managers, he adds.

“The momentum now is with the farmers: they are the ones driving it.”

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