

Nutrition and Management of Heifers and Young Cows on Schroeder-Manatee Ranch

Cliff W. Coddington

Cattle Manager
Schroeder-Manatee Ranch, Inc.
Bradenton, Florida

Over the years, our experience with planting ryegrasses, Ona stargrasses, *Hemarthria* grass, using different supplements, palpating and condition scoring has left us with a lot of still unanswered questions. We believe that a heifer should be treated like a heifer until she reaches 5 years of age. These heifers or young cows seem to be growing still, plus they are raising a calf and rebreeding.

At this time, we no longer plant any winter ryegrass due to cost controls and weather. We grow all of our heifers and young cows on either stargrass or *Hemarthria*, through the first calf. These heifers then go on our best bahiagrass pastures, according to age. The supplement we use consists mainly of a high-energy molasses (16%); level of feeding is based on the heifers' or young cows' needs during winter and summer months.

By palpating and condition scoring, we have discovered some interesting things about how cattle of different ages breed under the same management and forage conditions. Among cows in the same herd, we've had animals of age 6 and older breed at 95% while the cattle of age 5 and younger were breeding at a rate of 40% less. We now keep these younger cows grouped according to age, sometimes supplement them differently, and also keep them on our better bahiagrass pasture. We now consistently get these young cows rebred at 80%. The conception rate is 25 to 30% better than if the heifers were put into an adult herd after their first calf. For an example, 100 head of cows with 25% more calves have a potential economic value of \$10,000. Even if you are a small producer, this extra income could help pay for new fences, additional supplements, and ultimately increase profits.

NOTES: