



# COUNTRYSIDE KEYNOTES

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 Countryside Feed



## READY, SET, WEAN

## ARE YOU READY FOR WEANING?

*By Tara Jo Bina, Countryside Feed Nutrition and Sales*

Whether you are planning to early wean or stick to a traditional weaning period, making sure you are prepared can make a stressful time a little easier! Here are a few tips to prepare for weaning:

- **Functional Facilities**

Check fences, gates, chutes, etc. to make sure everything is working properly. There isn't much that will ruin your day like a sort gate that falls off the hinges, or a hole in the fence! Making sure your facilities are ready to separate cows and calves ahead of time can help avoid a big headache on weaning day!

- **Health Program**

Work with your veterinarian to develop vaccination, deworming, and potential treatment protocols well ahead of your planned weaning date. Local veterinarians will have a handle on what you should be vaccinating for and what vaccines are the most effective. Starting these conversations ahead of weaning time ensures you will have time to develop a program and get in the supplies you will need.

- **Water Availability**

Water is often overlooked but is the most important nutrient we can offer cattle. If calves are not used to drinking from an automatic waterer and that is the only way water is available, many calves will struggle. Letting waterers overflow for a few days or offering a tank close to the automatic waterer can help with successful weaning.

- **Feed Program**

Working with your nutritionist or Countryside Feed representative to develop a nutrition program for your weaned calves is very important. Good, palatable hay and grain offered soon after weaning provides nutrition to help calves cope with the stress of weaning. Another supplement option to consider is Stress tubs. Calves that are not getting to the bunk for one reason or another, can still get nutrition through these tubs!

A great reason to start this conversation early, is to start adapting calves to your weaning nutrition program early. Creep feeding the last 30 days on the cow is a great way to get calves used to coming to a bunk and tubs are also a resource that can be used before weaning to have a familiar feed source in the weaning pen.

Bunk accessibility is also important to consider when talking about nutrition. Giving calves 18 – 24 inches of bunk space gives them the opportunity to get to the bunk without too much competition. If you are early weaning, make sure bunks are not too tall for small calves to reach.

For more information about preparing for weaning or developing a weaning nutrition plan contact your Countryside Feed Sales Representative!



**SENECA**  
PO BOX 205  
1972 K-187  
SENECA, KS  
(785) 336-6777

**HILLSBORO**  
101 SANTA FE  
HILLSBORO, KS  
(620) 947-3111



## WHAT TO DO WITH *HIGH NITRATES*?

Given the drought conditions in some locations this year, many producers may be asking themselves how to handle the annual forages they have standing in the field that may not have grown as much as would be expected under normal conditions. These drought stressed forages can be high in nitrates and may be potentially toxic to cattle.

The amount of nitrates cattle can consume without an issue depends a lot on the situation and management. If the forage to be grazed is high moisture it is often lower risk. Fresh forages release nitrates into the rumen at a slower rate than dry forages. The slower release rate allows rumen microbes that convert toxic nitrite to ammonia, to better keep up with nitrate inflow. If the forage is mature and dried out, the rate of release of nitrate and thus the risks would be greater, more like hay. A few things to understand about risks when grazing higher nitrate forages:

1. The capacity of the microbial population in the rumen to detoxify nitrite will increase with exposure to nitrate. Nitrates tend to be greatest in the bottom of the stem and with the least nitrates in the leaf. If given the opportunity, cattle tend to select leaf material first and work their way down the plant, slowly increasing their nitrate exposure over the grazing period. Therefore, the microbial population in the rumen of grazing cattle may have time to adapt to higher nitrate concentrations by the time the animal consumes the stem and lower portions of the plant. Thus, gradual adaptation is a key management strategy. Producers should not strip graze high nitrate forages, but allow cattle to be selective. To adapt the cattle, start by grazing the lowest-nitrate fields and then work up to the highest.

2. Grazing cattle often have a slower rate of dry matter intake than when eating harvested forages. Again, this means that the microbes can better keep pace with the nitrate inflow. Feeding cattle prior to turnout can help slow initial intake of high nitrate feed.

3. Higher dietary energy increases the rate of detoxification. Thus, cattle grazing immature forages can have lower risk than mature forages with the same amount of nitrate. Previous research found that feeding a couple pounds of corn to cattle when feeding mature high nitrate forages can lower risk. So, if the forage is not young/immature, producers should consider grain supplementation.

Even though the potential for nitrate toxicity exists, careful grazing and cattle management can be used to eliminate cattle

losses. Ultimately, the decision to graze high nitrate fields is a judgement call and a question of how much risk one is willing to take.

*From Mary Drownoski,  
Nebraska Extension Beef Systems Specialist*

### COMEDY CORNER

**My wife complained  
she wished someone  
other than her would  
do some dusting.**

Crop dusting evidently  
is not what she had in  
mind.

### EMPLOYEE *anniversaries*

J.T. GEHLING  
2 years

TARA JO BINA  
5 years



CONTACT OUR  
**SALES & NUTRITION TEAM**



TARA JO BINA  
913-370-2556  
tbina@countrysidefeed.com

DEAN BECKER  
785-294-0415  
dbecker@countrysidefeed.com

DAN BAUM  
785-617-0198  
dbaum@countrysidefeed.com

KYLE KRAMER  
785-294-2767  
kkramer@countrysidefeed.com

JESSE BARNES  
620-382-5463  
jbarnes@countrysidefeed.com

KYLE CEDERBERG  
620-382-6284  
kdcdrbrg@countrysidefeed.com

CLINT LANNING  
620-276-9824  
clanning@countrysidefeed.com