



THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

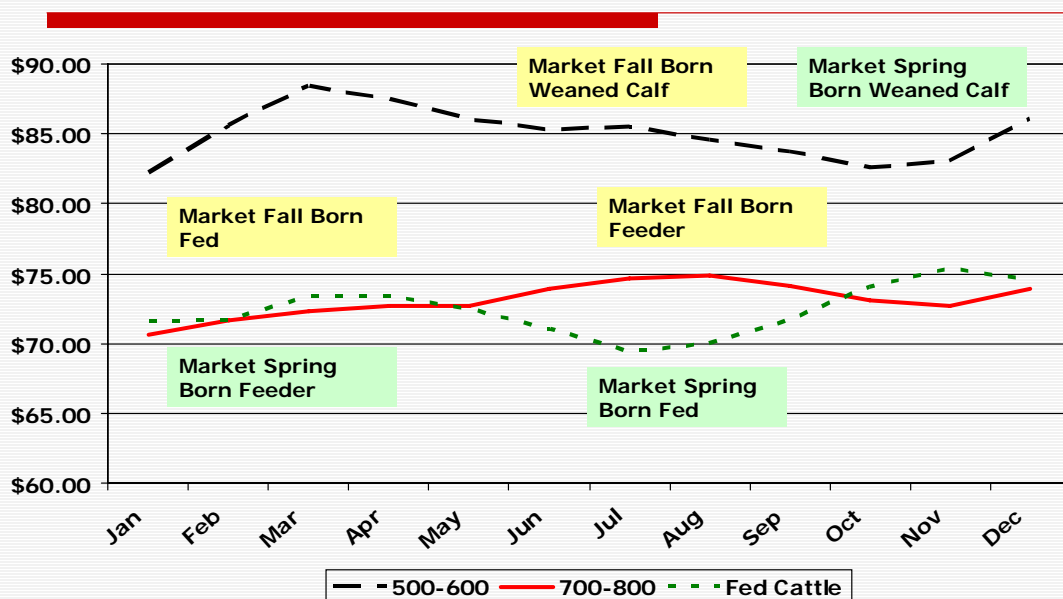
An Economic Analysis of Fall Vs. Spring Calving Curt Lacy Extension Economist-Livestock

Introduction

The question of the economics of fall vs. spring calving is one that is often asked. In a nutshell, fall calving will typically generate higher returns due to higher prices for heavier calves. Conversely, spring calving typically makes use of seasonal forage availability and results in lower costs per cow.

Fall calving (Sep-Nov) is attractive to many producers because cows calve in more moderate conditions, and revenue is usually higher with fall born calves. Typically fall calving result in more gross revenue dollars per calf because calves are older at weaning and they are usually marketed earlier in the year when prices are higher. Fall calving also allows producers who “push” their calves some to market heavier feeders early in the fall as opposed to wintering calves on pasture. Finally, fall calving allows producers who wish to retain ownership to market fed cattle during the first part of the year when fed cattle prices are at their highest.

Seasonal Prices and Marketing Times for Various Weight Classes



The primary downside to fall calving is that it usually costs more because of higher feed costs as the cows highest nutritional needs occur at the time of year when forage is most limited.

Spring calving (Jan-Mar) on the other hand, will typically producer a lighter calf because by the time the calves are physically capable of utilizing forage, most high quality forage is gone. Perhaps more seriously, most spring-born calves are marketed in the fall when prices are at their lowest. However, the primary advantage of spring calving is that costs are typically lower due to cows nutritional needs being matched to the available forage resources.

Economic Analysis

An economic comparison of fall vs. spring calving was performed and the results are presented in Table 1. The analysis was conducted for 60 cows with an 85% calf crop. It assumes that fall born calves weigh 25 pounds more at weaning than spring born calves (535 vs. 510). It also assumes that cows in the fall calving system will receive supplemental feeding for 3 additional weeks compared to the spring calving herd.

Table 1
Economic Comparison of Fall vs. Spring Calving

<i>Item</i>	<i>Fall Calving</i>	<i>Spring calving</i>
Revenue per calf*	\$418.54	\$388.33
Variable cost per cow	\$365.32	\$351.91
Total cost per cow	\$586.52	\$573.11
Total net revenue	(\$574.01)	(\$1,309.63)
\$/Cwt. Variable cost	\$84.56	\$85.45
\$/Cwt. Total Cost	\$135.77	\$139.16

Prices used are 1996-2005 average prices for 500-600 pound steers sold through GA auctions. Jul-Aug average = \$85.00/cwt. and Oct-Nov average = \$82.81

In this analysis, fall calving results in net profits of about \$735 or about \$12 more per cow than spring calving. In the fall calving system, the total cost per cow is somewhat higher but the total cost per hundredweight is actually lower. Put another way with the higher feeding cost per cow, fall born calves must average weighing about 15 pounds each than spring born calves to make up the difference.

This analysis does not consider the additional net revenue from selling heavier feeders later in the summer or fall or retaining ownership through the finishing phase. However, anecdotal evidence and personal observation in past years indicate very favorable returns for producers who can market heavier weight feeders in Aug-Sep or fed cattle from Oct-April.

Summary

The net differences in profits for fall vs. spring calving for producers marketing weaned calves are relatively small. However, for producers who are interested in marketing heavier weight feeders or retaining ownership through the finishing phase, fall calving offers several economic advantages. As always, producers should use information specific to their operation to make a decision.