Weaning & Creep Feeding Buffalo Calves

-Kim Dowling

Creep feeding calves during drought may reduce forage intake by calves and increase weaning weight. However, it may not mean more profit at market time, depending on creep feed prices. Advance computation of expenses versus income and eventual outcome is essential at this point. Producers need to compare cost of added gain to the value of added gain before creep feeding.

A calf receiving creep feed will consume less forage, but milk consumption will stay the same. Calves usually consume milk first then creep feed and then forage. Small "domesticated" herds may give good results from creep feeding, while the larger, more extensively managed herds may not. Including older calves to teach the younger ones to enter the creep and eat may help in this circumstance. An advantage to creep feeding is easier handling and training opportunities for those calves going to dry lot for slaughter.

Creep feeding not only spares the pastures, it can also help increase your calf crop. Even in the wild a cow will allow her calf to suckle to the age of two or three, letting the new calf starve. By weaning every fall, you could increase your calf survival rate.

Weaning and feeding calves when they are eight to ten months old enables the cow to winter better and produce a stronger calf each year. Older cows, 25-30 year old, tend to wean as early as four months, while younger cows need an extra push to wean.

Confining your weaned calves to a separate pasture well out of ear shot and smelling distance could save several hours of fence mending. Out of sight and scent—out of mind! A buffalo calf tends to grunt (bawl) less when weaned than a domestic calf.

Additives and supplements are not necessary when creep feeding a buffalo calf unless the calf is closely confined or grazing on deficient soil. Remember you are dealing with a wild animal. The more he is left alone, the better he gets along.

Important facts to consider when deciding to wean and creep feed:

- 1) Feeding the calf is cheaper than feeding the cow enough to sustain the calf.
- 2) Weaker, poorer calves stand a better chance to keep up with the other calves when not competing with the larger animals for the choice feed.
- 3) It is easier to sort, separate and count the calves when they are away from the main herd.
 - 4) Higher calf crop with stronger, healthier cows.
 - 5) Creep feeding can save on pastures during a drought.
- 6) It is easier to work the cows without worrying about the calves getting hurt in the shuffle.
- 7) Smoother transition from creep feeding to dry lot feed for slaughter.

