

Cattle Business in Mississippi – June 2016
“Beef Production Strategies” article
Summer Calves Anyone?

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When it comes to beef production, most farmers can “justify” many practices that we recommend not doing. I will admit, I can be that producer too. I use bias in my selection decisions, I take a chances on AI breeding to unproven bulls, and may give cows one more chance when they should be culled. Nearly every time these “justifications” usually turn around and haunt me. If there is one practice I absolutely cannot justify on my farm – it is cows calving in the summer. While there are a few systems in which summer calving can be desired, most Mississippi producers should avoid calving their cows in June, July, and August due to our climate, increased predation, and insects.

According to U.S. Climate Data (www.usclimatedata.com), the three warmest months of the year in Mississippi are June (Average High Temp: 89°F), July (Average High Temp: 92°F), and August (Average High Temp: 92°F) (See Figure 1). Likewise, the average relative humidity percentages peak during the summer - the average daily humidity is 74-77 all summer long. (I am sure many of you trying to get hay up and out of the field can vouch for these stats.) The combination of temperature and humidity on a typical summer day automatically place beef cattle in the Danger or Emergency zones for the Temperature Humidity Index (See Figure 2). Add in the fact that a new born calf is both wet and stressed – conditions get critical, rapidly.

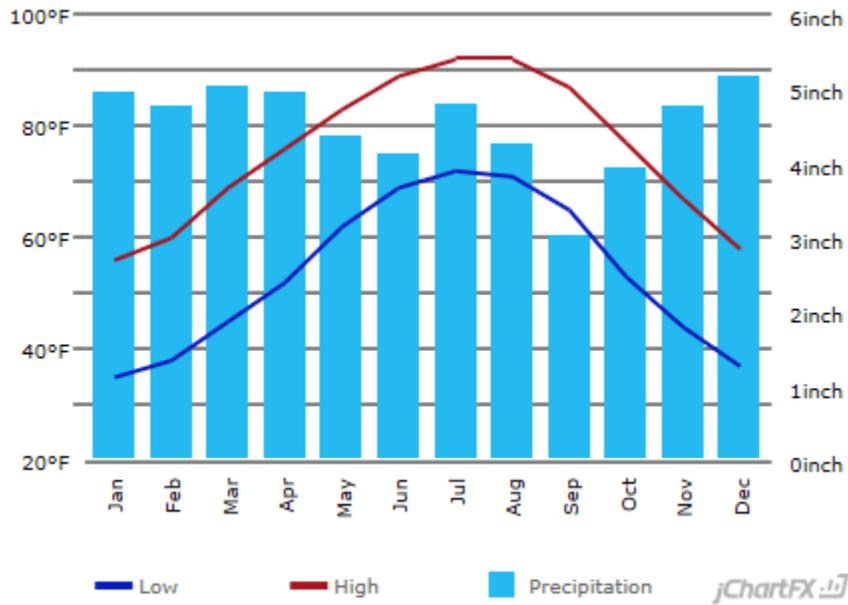
If the heat isn't enough to get you to think about not calving in the summer – think about predation. In Mississippi our two primary predators are coyotes and black headed vultures. When we think about their lifecycles, both coyotes and buzzards have their peak reproduction rates during the summer months. With extra mouths to feed, a new born calf is an easy target. I have personally witnessed cows being badgered by the vultures to the point of abandoning a calf and retreating to the shade. I don't think snakes necessarily classify as predators, but they do bite and seem to be very abundant this summer thanks to our mild winter. Snake bites can cause calves to run fever and be lethargic which can also make them an easy appetizer for a coyote or buzzard.

I don't think flies and fire ants classify as predators, but I know they are certainly more abundant during the summer months. I always recommend that when new calves are processed that they are sprayed with an aerosol fly spray. There are several on the market that are very effective in repelling flies from new calves.

Last but not least, consider all management practices that take place on your farm during the summer. Most farmers will be mowing pastures, spraying weeds, or cutting hay at some point during June, July or August. With new calves being born during this time, these tasks take much more time and diligence. On my farm in Alabama, our success rate with summer calves is much lower compared to calves born during the fall or spring calving seasons. With a defined calving season, proper management of cattle is easier to achieve. I hope you have a great summer with plenty of backyard barbecues, nights at the ball park, or any type of recreational activities you may enjoy – without bothersome summer calves!

If you would like to contact me, my email address is cobie.rutherford@msstate.edu and phone is [662-325-4344](tel:662-325-4344).

For more information about beef cattle production, contact an office of the Mississippi State University Extension Service or visit extension.msstate.edu.



Beef Cattle Temperature Humidity Index

		Relative Humidity (%)											
		30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85
Temperature (°F)	100	84	85	86	87	88	90	91	92	93	94	95	97
	98	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	93	94	95
	96	81	82	83	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93
	94	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91
	92	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	85	86	87	88	89
	90	78	79	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	86	87
	88	76	77	78	79	80	81	81	82	83	84	85	86
	86	75	76	77	78	78	79	80	81	81	82	83	84
	84	74	75	75	76	77	78	78	79	80	80	81	82
	82	73	73	74	75	75	76	77	77	78	79	79	80
	80	72	72	73	73	74	75	75	76	76	77	78	78
	78	70	71	71	72	73	73	74	74	75	75	76	76
	76	69	70	70	71	71	72	72	73	73	74	74	75
		Temperature Humidity Index (THI)											

Normal <75	Alert 75-78	Danger 79-83	Emergency >84
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