



Creep Feeding and Early Weaning to Increase Calf Production and Ranch Profitability in Sonora, Mexico

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Three weaning systems were compared in central Sonora, Mexico, with charbray cows and their calves during 2006 and 2007. Systems compared were: 1) early weaning (EW), 2) creep feeding (CF) and 3) traditional (Control). Twenty cows were randomly selected in each group. Evaluated variables were: calf birth weight, cow calving weight, early weaning weight and calf selling weight; cow weight and condition at early weaning, culling and calf sell; cost-benefit and profitability. Evaluated variables were analyzed by ANOVA ($P < 0.05$). Financial models were conducted with computer software assuming 100 animal units/year at each scenario. Results show that daily gains were 1.32, 1.31 and 0.43 kg/calf/day for EW, CF and the control. Body weight of EW cows did not significantly change ($P < 0.05$) and it remained constant among years, but cows at CF and the controls lost 56 to 63 kg every year. Cows with EW and CF calves rebred faster after calving with 90, 165 and 240 days and had higher percent calf crop with 95, 85 and 75% for EW, CF and control, respectively. Annual gains with EW varied from \$108,571 to \$119,782 pesos, while it varied from \$54,486 to \$69,453 with CF. The control yielded negative numbers during the 10 years of projection with an annual deficit varying from \$10,381 to \$56,245 pesos. We conclude that high production costs and low calf market prices are putting traditional ranching at risk in Mexico. Both EW and CF are potential alternatives to increase calf production and ranch profitability.

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