


# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

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## Farm Update

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AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES  
EDUCATION

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### **Cowherd Expansion is Not the Only Way to Capitalize on a Strong Calf Market**

Much has been written recently about the strength of the current cattle market. With beef cow inventory at a 60+ year low and demand being very strong, cow-calf operations are clearly in the driver's seat. Dr. Kenny Burdine, University of Kentucky Beef Extension Economist, details some options to increase revenue from beef cattle without increasing your herd numbers in the following article.

Expansion is often the first opportunity that comes to mind in a strong calf market, and there is likely merit in expansion if doing so is consistent with the goals of the operation. However, some producers may not be interested in growing the size of their cowherds due to land or management constraints or other reasons. There are other opportunities worth considering.

Some producers may choose to use the current increase in cow-calf revenues to improve the genetics of their herds. Investment in genetics often has long-run implications, resulting in more valuable calves to sell over multiple years. Sires certainly come to mind, but the current calf market combined with the strong cull cow prices may provide an opportunity to cull a bit harder and replace with higher quality females.

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Working facilities are crucial resources for cow-calf operations for numerous reasons. Value-added opportunities such as health protocols, post-weaning programs, castration, implants, etc. are made much easier with quality working facilities. The same is true for receiving, sorting, and loading of cattle. If facilities have historically been a constraint, the current market may be providing an opportunity to make improvements and position the operation to sell higher value calves in the future.

Winter feeding days are typically the most expensive days for cow-calf operations as stored feed (hay) is being fed. Improved grazing systems (interior fencing, additional water sources, portable mineral feeders, etc.) allow for more efficient use of existing forage during the grazing season. This has the potential to increase the number of grazing days and reduce the number of hay feeding days. In most cases, this results in lower costs per cow per year and puts an operation in a better position when calf prices fall.

Strong markets also provide an opportunity to make financial moves that set an operation up for the long run. Increased revenues may allow an operation to pay down some debt and thereby lower its cost structure going forward. Similarly, it may provide an opportunity to build some working capital and lower dependence on operating loans. In both cases, future interest expenses are reduced, which has implications for profitability.

To be clear, the purpose of this article was not to discourage expansion. The main point is that the current calf market provides a significant opportunity for a cow-calf operation to position itself for a successful future, and that will look different for each one of them.

## **Disease Watch in Corn**

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Several factors must align for fungicide use in corn to provide a positive return on investment. First is timing. Research has proven over and over that corn growth stage timings most likely to provide a positive yield response are the late vegetative stages, V10 to VT. Applications applied R1, silking stage, or later may benefit if disease is present, but yield may already be lost by disease damage to the leaves. The second factor is whether disease is present and if the environment is right for its development. We're used to the risk of southern corn leaf rust. It prefers hot weather, which is typical for us, but fortunately cannot survive our winters. It is currently confirmed in the Mississippi River valley of northeast Arkansas. The new disease challenge is Tar Spot. Tar spot has infected many local fields over the past couple of years and can overwinter in Kentucky. Fortunately, our environment is typically hotter than tar spot prefers. Tar spot activity increases when 24-hour temperatures range from 64-73 degrees. Whether fungicide is used or not, the goal is that neither disease appears nor arrives too late in the season to affect yield. Infection of SCLR or Tar Spot anytime through R4, dough stage, can reduce yield in the absence of fungicide.

## **Kentucky Farm Succession Seminar**

Remember to register for the July 23 Kentucky Farm Succession Seminar at the Owensboro Convention Center on my website at <https://daviess.ca.uky.edu/events/farm-succession-seminar>.

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