



UW Cooperative Extension Service  Profitable & Sustainable Agricultural Systems  Risk Management Agency

Big Horn County dry bean growers use yield protection insurance – Part one

By James Sedman and
John Hewlett

It is spring, and Big Horn County farmers Ken and Rich Riff of Riff Brothers Farms are assessing plans for the coming year.

The brothers farm 600 acres of dry beans, sugar beets, and barley. Commodity prices are high, and the coming production season has the potential for those prices to hold into the fall. The brothers also note that input prices are at or near historical highs and are looking to



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Yield or revenue protection insurance could be a fit in your crop operation to help cover losses due to yield or revenue declines. For more information on yield protection, consult your crop insurance agent or visit the Western Risk Management Library online at agecon.uwyo.edu/riskmgt.

guarantee a certain revenue level to protect their bottom line. Their area is recovering from drought, and they are concerned severe weather could return. For their 240 acres of dry beans (120 acres each of pintos and northern), they have outlined several risk management options:

1. No insurance. The Riffs have taken a chance by not purchasing insurance in past years and come out ahead; however, they believe there is too much at stake this year to gamble with no risk protection.
2. Catastrophic coverage (CAT) as part of a yield protection insurance policy. This policy is low cost (\$300 per crop) and uses the Riffs' actual production history (APH) yield to insure against losses of 50 percent or greater. CAT coverage is fixed at 50 percent of average yield and 55 percent of the production price.
3. Yield Protection Insurance (YP). YP insurance is similar to multi-peril policies offered in previous years. The Riffs can choose to insure 50 to 75 percent of their APH yield at

67 to 100 percent of the harvest price. The harvest price is set at the time the policy is purchased and, in this case, it would be \$0.31/pound for northern and \$0.30/pound for pintos. In the event of severe weather or other natural disasters, an indemnity would be paid for losses below the guarantee level.

The Riffs' Decision and Production Peril

The Riff brothers chose to purchase YP insurance for their dry bean acreage. They believed that CAT coverage was insufficient – not allowing them to cover even their production costs. They elected to insure at 75 percent coverage and 100 percent harvest price levels. For purposes of our analysis, their premium cost will be \$20 per acre. By using YP insurance, the Riffs are also qualified for any future disaster assistance payments should they become available.

The Riffs' planting season was wet but was completed without major delays. Problems arose, however, as several severe storms within a two-week period brought hail and heavy rains just as the beans were emerging.



The crops were damaged but not badly enough to result in a total loss. One of their main concerns was an irrigation pivot (120 acres) of pinto beans that was unable to operate most of the summer due to standing water in the field from the abundant spring rains.

The next installment in this series will examine how YP insurance performed and compare it to other risk management options the Riffs considered.

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Low-stress weaning results in more time spent grazing

By Steve Paisley

As we continue to better understand the important interactions between herd management and herd health programs on lifetime calf performance and carcass quality, ways to reduce calf stress has become increasingly important.

Low-stress weaning strategies have increased dramatically over the last few years. Most low-stress approaches to weaning look for ways to make the weaning process more natural and less abrupt. Attention to detail is important for all weaning methods, and good management can reduce stress in any program.

For fence line weaning, animals remain in a familiar pasture environment. Initial weaning is accomplished by having cows and calves separated by a fence. Typically, this fence is a woven wire fence, multiple-strand electric fence, or a combination of both. In many situations, fencing out the cows is a bigger challenge than containing the calves.

Many fence line programs incorporate a transition to supplemental feed as well. Both cows and



calves can continue to graze, and several studies have shown that fence line-weaned calves vocalize (bawl) less and walk less than traditional abrupt-weaned calves.

Nose Clips on Calves

A more recent non-abrupt weaning practice uses plastic nose clips that allow pairs to remain together but prevents the calf from nursing the cow. After five to seven

days, the clips can be removed, and calves can be separated. Using nose clips has the potential to reduce stress on the calf as opposed to traditional weaning practices, but it does not require a special pasture for fence line.

Once the clips are applied, calves are returned with the cows. Many studies refer to this process as two-step, or two-stage, weaning

with preventing nursing being the first step followed by either calf or dam removal as the second step.

Studies at Virginia, Michigan, and Saskatchewan investigated the two-stage (nose clip) method as compared to traditional and fence line weaning.

In all cases, fence line and two-stage weaning resulted in less bawling and walking or pacing, and, in studies where measured, more time spent eating. Two-stage calves bawled less than fence line-weaned calves and appeared to spend more time grazing.

All of these observations would suggest a reduction in stress for the non-abrupt weaned calves.

Nose Clip Use Indicates Least Stress

Daily gains during the first two weeks after weaning seem to also favor non-abrupt weaned calves, but by four to six weeks following weaning, there were no differences in calf performance. The Michigan State studies found that two-stage (nose clips) seemed to show the lowest amount of observable stress; however, blood metabolite



data suggested these animals still experienced stress, perhaps related to discomfort associated with the placement and presence of the nose clips.

In well-managed herds, non-abrupt weaning practices appear to result in more "normal" behavior for calves and cows resulting in less perceived stress. While initial studies comparing the three methods have not indicated differences in carcass quality, additional studies are needed for a definitive answer.

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