

Midwest Messenger LIVESTOCK

ROUNDUP

Calf adoption program opens 4-H opportunities

By Nick Hytrek
Sioux City Journal

Like many other kids involved in 4-H, Emmanuel Ruiz Del Olmo and Kylee Kurtzleben spent a recent warm, humid day with halter in hand, practicing leading their calves in preparation for the upcoming county fair.

But if not for a unique arrangement, they would only be observing the Sioux County Youth Fair bottle-bucket calf show rather than participating in it.

Dordt University received 14 newborn crossbred calves March 11 and, in partnership with county 4-H organizers, offered them to Sioux County kids to exhibit.

All 14 calves were quickly adopted and were shown in the fair July 10-17.

The adoption program was a longtime goal of Mike Schouten at Dordt's Agriculture Stewardship Center, where the calves are housed.

He wanted to see kids who lived in town and were unable to raise calves or kids whose family couldn't afford to buy a calf have the chance to show an animal at the fair.

"I wanted to give a young student or child a chance to get involved with 4-H," Schouten said. "It's a win-win for everybody. We've been blessed with these calves. We have a chance to bless someone else with the use of these calves."

Through the Iowa State University Extension office in Sioux County, the calves were made available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Dordt houses the calves and pays for feed. Dordt ag students and staff feed and care for the animals and mentor the 4-H kids when they come to help feed, clean and train them.

"This essentially is providing them with an animal. It's an affordable way for kids to get involved in the agriculture industry," said Jade Bakker, youth coordinator for ISU Extension and Outreach in Sioux County.

All 14 calves, donated by Tri-Cross Dairy in Viborg, South Dakota, were adopted this year.

So many kids responded, there was a waiting list, and Bakker said an application process will need to be developed if the response continues to be so strong.

Emmanuel and Kylee, 12-year-old members of the Sioux County Pulse 4-H Club, both live in town — Emmanuel in Hawarden, Kylee in Sioux Center — making it impossible to raise their own calves.

"I thought it was awesome that I could have the experience of working with cattle," Emmanuel said.

His parents drive him to Sioux Center almost daily to help feed and clean his calf and to train it



Sioux City Journal photo by Tim Hynds

Kylee Kurtzleben, 12, of Sioux Center, Iowa, washes her bucket calf at the Dordt University Agriculture Stewardship Center in Sioux Center. Looking on is her brother, Kipton.

to walk on a halter with him in the show ring.

"It's a great opportunity for him to get experience being involved with animals and agriculture. It's great for the kids," Emmanuel's father, Omar Ruiz, said as he watched his son work with his calf.

A couple pens over, Kylee led her young steer named Spunky outside to walk and wash him.

Her mother had seen information about adopting a calf on Facebook and asked if she'd be interested. Kylee signed up, and has learned the responsibilities of caring for a show animal.

"It's gone amazing. He's really nice," Kylee said of her calf. "I learned how to be in control and teach him to like you."

Kylee's mother, Emily Kurtzleben, grew up in eastern Iowa and worked for a dairy farmer who let her adopt calves to show at the fair.

"I wanted her to get farm experience and learn how to be responsible and work with a larger animal," Kurtzleben said.

While working with their adopted calves, all 4-H kids fill out a project book.

In addition to showing the animals in the ring, they'll be interviewed by a judge about their calves and the project's objectives.

"To me, it's just a blessing that they get to participate in 4-H," Schouten said.

Experts give tips on cattle genetics, grazing

By Crystal Reed
Iowa Farmer Today

Solo cups aren't just for summer barbecues. They're also something to look for in a cattle herd.

During the Illinois Grazing Lands Coalition's Heart of America Grazing Conference July 15-16 in Effingham, Steve Campbell of Tailor Made Cattle described the ideal cow for fertility and profitability — one he has termed the "Solo Cup Cow."

Campbell spoke on "Picking the Right Genetics for Your Environment." Over many years, many mentors and many cows, he has settled on a shape the majority of highly fertile, highly profitable and low maintenance cows have in common.

She will look like she is walking downhill, Campbell said, have a larger gut than the herd average, have a wider butt than the herd average and have more slope from hooks down to pins than the herd average.

"You want the rump on the cow to be at least 40% as wide as she is tall, otherwise you could have some calving troubles," he said.

Campbell said the reason the cow slopes downhill on level ground is estrogen shuts down long bone growth on the front end of the female first.

"The cows whose ribs angle back tends to take better care of their calf than the cows whose ribs go straight up and down," he said.

Another characteristic to look for: a scar instead of a star on the forehead. Campbell said a scar-shaped hair whorl means the pituitary, testes and ovaries were developed at the same time, which indicates there is a problem in the testes or ovaries in the offspring.

Vertical folds in the hide are the No. 1 indicator of butterfat in a cow. The more vertical folds in the hide and the farther back they go, the better. Campbell said if you find them from the vulva to the udder, they are always good cows.

Also watch the backbone.

"When they go to eat if their backbone doesn't go below their shoulder blades, they are a harder-keeping cow," he said.

The more the backbone stays above the shoulder blades when they are standing, the more feed it's going to take for that cow, he said. The earlier in life you see the stifle muscles stick out — bull or heifer — the more fertile the cow is and the more butterfat the animal has.

Campbell said in the early 1990s they were measuring to try to figure out what shape would give the most gain with the least drain on feed. For each inch that a steer is bigger around the heart, there was 37 more pounds of gain and 37 fewer pounds of feed needed to do it.

With efficient and profitable cows, producers need efficient and profitable pasture.

Greg Halich, a forage systems economist at the University of Kentucky, presented on pasture fertilizer. Halich said he used to row crop with a friend who provided most of the equipment. They had to use a lot of fertilizer and spraying.

But on his farm now, he has not had to utilize commercial fertilizer or spray weeds. Producers cannot simply stop using fertilizer and not change their management practices, though, he said.

Farmers first have to understand the underlying problems causing weeds, otherwise they will come back even if you spray, he said.

During the first grazing season on the farm, he



IFT photo by Crystal Reed

Steve Campbell speaks on physical characteristics of a more fertile cow during the July 16 Illinois Grazing Lands Coalition's Heart of America Grazing Conference in Effingham, Ill..

was dealing with weeds. Halich said that the land was poorly managed for probably three decades before the organic matter was burned out, causing very little nitrogen cycling in the soil.

The first step is using legumes to get the nitrogen cycle going. By the sixth grazing season, he was getting a good mix of grass and clover.

"If you are getting too much nitrogen in the ground over the years it won't be hard to keep good legumes in there because the grasses are responding so well from that nitrogen," he said.

The second strategy is to use bale grazing to recycle nutrients and stimulate soil biology.

The third strategy is using weeds and deep-rooted forbs to cycle nutrients.

"We can use the weeds not only to cycle nutrients, we can also feed the biology," Halich said.

The fourth is to avoid overgrazing. Soil temperature is affected by radiant heat, and if there is no buffer, soil temperature will be higher than air temperature.

Two ways to avoid overgrazing are to do basic rotation and stocking rate analysis.

Halich gave Illinois farmers timing recommendations for managing pasture growth. From May 4-10, start clipping right behind the cattle. On the first round, he will clip about 6

inches.

"You have to do that before it slows down," Halich said. "If you wait until July to do that and it's drier, you're not going to get much regrowth, and the weeds will take advantage of that."

He tries to start his second clippings around mid-August and finish by mid-September. The difference is he clips a lot higher — maybe 8-10 inches.

To manage drought, he puts out hay in very low densities, but it has to be done early.

"When you start getting a little nervous about it getting dry, it's time to put hay out," Halich said.



IFT photo by Crystal Reed

Greg Halich, University of Kentucky forage economist, speaks on reducing or eliminating fertilizer for pastures.