

Use of natural grasslands of Flooding Pampas for pregnant beef yearling heifers during winter

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We hypothesize that natural grasslands do not provide the nutrients required by pregnant beef yearling heifers during winter. If this hypothesis is confirmed, the yearling heifers would suffer weight loss during winter and as a consequence, pregnancy will be adversely affected and the mean calving dates will be delayed. To proof this, after pregnancy test in May of 2005 and 2006, heifers with live weights around 400 kg, were randomly allocated to three treatments until October: a) mesophytic grassland without legumes (PNM), b) hydromorphic grasslands with *Lotus tenuis*, (PHL) and c) cultivated pastures with legumes (PCM). During these periods, the following estimations were made: a) dry matter availability, organic matter digestibility and protein content of grasslands b) diet quality and dry matter consumption according with the procedure set by Lyons and Stuth (1992), c) calving intervals between first and second year, d) first and second pregnancy percentage. During May forage consumption represented 2% of the live weight, while during October this percentage increased to 2.6, 2.7 and 2.5 % respectively for the PNCL, PNSL and PD. Increased forage consumption in spring shows that forage selection and nutrition improved during lactation. Condition scores was 6 (1 thin and 9 fat) at the beginning of experiment and maintained at 5 or 5.5 points later. Pregnancy was 97 and 100% for first and second year. Mean calving date was 227.1 and 227.8 (Julian days) for first and second calving season. We conclude that natural grasslands did provide the nutrients required by yearling beef heifers. These results suggest that due to the high live weight of heifers at the onset of winter, the natural grasslands could be used without negative effects on reproductive performance of heifers.

References

LYONS R.K. and STUTH J.W. 1992. Fecal NIRS equation for predicting diet quality of free ranging cattle. *Journal of Range Management*, **45**, 238-244