INCREASING MEAT PRODUCTION AND RETURNS FROM CULL COWS

2. POOR CONDITIONED PREGNANT COWS

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Up to 60% of cull cows are pregnant at slaughter in northern Australian abattoirs. Many are in poor body condition (subcutaneous rump fat depth 1-3mm) and with carcase weights less than 160kg (Ladds *et al* 1975) financial returns are low. An alternative may be to transfer these pregnant cows to finishing pastures (eg Central Queensland), then selling both cows and calves post calving.

This experiment examined cows transferred to Central Queensland and grazed on buffel grass pastures with the following treatments:
I- Initial slaughter group of pregnant cows in July.
3M- Slaughter both cows and suckling calves 3 months post calving in February.
6M- Slaughter both cows and suckling 6 months post calving in May.
EW- Calves early weaned in February onto pasture and fed a grain ration (75 % grain, 25 % concentrates) until May, with cows grazing similar pastures.
CF- Calves creep fed a grain ration (75% grain, 25 % conc.) with access to the cow (Feb. to May).
G- Both cows and suckling calf fed an Ad *lib* grain ration (86 % gram, 14% conc.)from Feb. to May.
Ration intakes for the EW and CF calves and *G* cows and calves were 4.5, 0.8 and 10.3 kg/unit/day respectively.

Table 1 Liveweight, carcase attributes and values of cows and calves at slaughter.

Treatment	Turnoff liveweight (kg)	Carcase weight (kg)	Calculated carcase gain[1] (kg)	Rump fat depth (mm)	Carcase value ($/head)	Total cow/calf value ($/unit)	Benefit:Cost ratio
COWS							
I	413	186	-	5	315	315	-
3M	451	197	8	4	339	484	3.47:1
6M	460	198	7	7	342	545	3.58:1
EW	489	225	35	13	403	587	2.32:1
CF	461	189	-2	5	323	540	2.50:1
G	473	213	23	11	374	570	1.25:1
CALVES							
I	-	-		-	0		
3M	126	69		3	145		
6M	195	112		3	203		
EW	189	103		4	184		
CF	210	118		5	217		
G	196	106		6	196		

1 Calculated carcase weight gain from July to February for 3M, from February to May for other treatments

The EW and G treatments resulted in heavier cow carcases with greater subcutaneous fat cover than other treatments (Table 1). There was little difference in the growth rates and carcase attributes of the treated calves, with the EW calves growing slowest (0.77kg/hd/day) and the CF fastest (0.89kg/hd/day). The greatest increase in value of the cow/calf unit of each treatment over I is due to the sale value of the calf. Treatments which produced a calf (3M and 6M), even without greatly improving the carcase weight and value of the cow, improved returns and recorded the most attractive benefit:cost ratios. Improving cow carcase weights and obtaining the calf (treatments EW and *G)* further improved the value of the cow/calf unit. While all treatments were positive, the extra input costs of the EW, G and CF treatments are reflected in lower benefit:cost ratios.

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Ladds, P. W., Summers, P.M. and Humphrey, J.D. (1975). *Aust. Vet. J.* 51:472.

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