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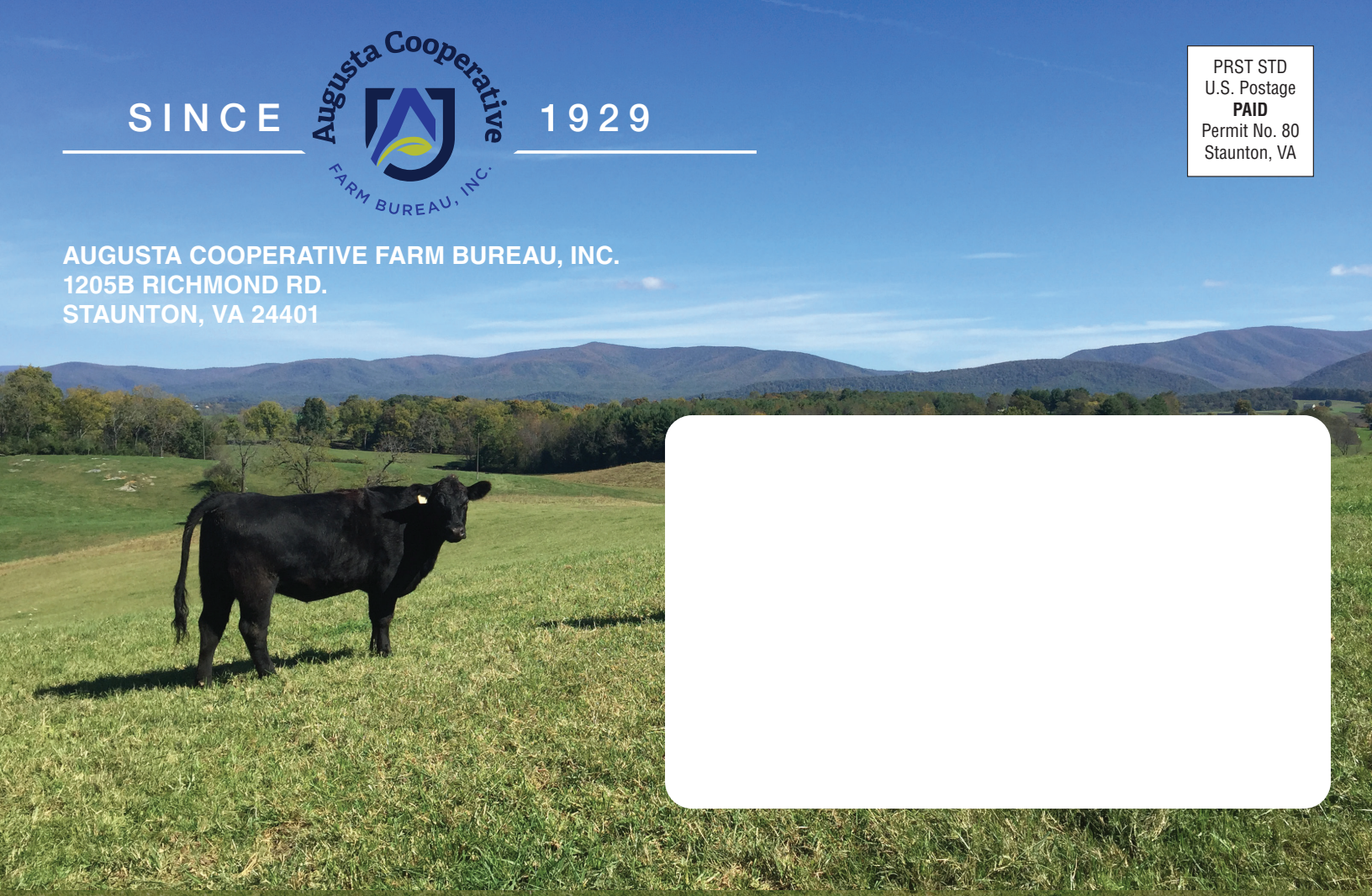

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AGRONOMY & BEEF BULLETIN

February 2026

SINCE 1929

Augusta Cooperative Farm Bureau, Inc.

DON'T TRY TO PREDICT THE NEXT GRAZING SEASON

January is a natural time to reflect back, think forward and set the stage for a more resilient grazing season.

After nearly two decades of writing Grazing Bites, one thing remains consistent: no two years are the same. Rainfall, temperatures, and growing conditions can swing dramatically. Because of that variability, the most dependable management strategies are the ones that function well regardless of weather. January is the month to revisit those principles, tighten the plan, and begin the year on solid footing.

A grazing plan is only as strong as the goals behind it. Winter offers the clearest mental space for honest assessment of the herd, the land and one's time. It invites you to sit down with a notebook, a cup of coffee and the experiences of the past season to ask realistic questions. What needs improvement this year—soil health, animal performance, pasture recovery, weed pressure and/or feed efficiency? Where did pressure show up last year—short forage, parasite challenges, worn-out fencing, and/or too much mud in high-use areas? Which changes are achievable—adding a cross fence, improving water access, moving livestock more frequently and/or adding warm-season grasses?

Effective goals should be specific and measurable, not vague intentions such as "graze better" or "get ahead of weeds." Beneficial goals sound more like maintaining a minimum four-inch residual on cool-season pastures, rotating every three-to-five days instead of every seven-to-ten, establishing a set number of warm-season forage acres or reducing purchased feed by a realistic percentage. Goals like these guide daily decisions, and daily decisions are what ultimately build resilient systems. January is an appropriate time to refine those intentions into something workable.

Winter is also an ideal time for a pasture inventory. With vegetation dormant, the landscape is easier to read. Areas that were grazed too tightly, too frequently or too conveniently stand out clearly. Bare spots, heavy-use areas, thin stands, and paddocks that consistently received excess pressure are more visible now than during the growing season. Low-fertility zones, compaction, erosion, broomsedge patches and water access issues are easier to identify. Even in dormancy, tools such as the Pasture Condition Scoresheet (PCS) can be useful. While a full assessment is best completed during active growth, using the PCS in winter helps highlight trends, flag paddocks that need attention, and establish a baseline for spring decisions. This is not the month for fixing everything, but it is the month for understanding what will require attention when growth resumes.

This is also a good time to update soil tests, especially if more than four years have passed since the last sampling. Soil tests help prevent major missteps and indicate whether fertility is improving, declining, or holding steady. They can identify fields that would benefit from lime or a modest, targeted nutrient input. Winter visibility also makes it easier to evaluate fencing, while water lines and troughs deserve attention as slow leaks and frost-related issues tend to reveal themselves now.

Regardless of how any year unfolds, one principle remains constant: plants need rest. More rest leads to deeper roots, greater forage production, improved resilience, and fewer weeds. Weather may influence how long rest periods need to be, but a grazing system should be designed to allow adequate recovery under any conditions. January is the time to ask whether paddock size and layout truly support rest, if water placement allows consistent rotation and reasonable walking distances, whether stocking rate or stock density needs adjustment and which paddocks should receive priority for longer recovery when spring arrives.

If the year turns wet, rest protects soil structure. If it turns dry, rest protects roots. If it turns average, rest usually results in more forage than expected. Rest is one of the few management tools that never backfires.

Soil health forms the foundation for productive grazing, and winter often reveals its condition more clearly than summer. Healthy soils respond to consistent habits: keeping living roots as long as possible, maintaining soil cover with residue, promoting plant diversity, minimizing disturbance, and managing stock density with intention. Even dormant roots support early spring biological activity. Residue reduces erosion and moderates soil temperature swings. Soil under stockpiled forage is often warmer and less deeply frozen than soil in overly grazed areas with little cover, primarily because standing forage and sod insulate the soil and slow heat loss, while microbial activity continues at a reduced rate through winter. Diversity improves resilience and forage distribution, and thoughtful stock density helps limit selective grazing and encourage more uniform use.

Animal performance improves when pastures are in balance. Nutrition gaps, parasite pressure, and inconsistent gains are frequently tied less to supplements or dewormers and more to forage quality, quantity and recovery time. Livestock perform best when rotations provide a clean grazing horizon and when forage is neither too short nor overly mature. Integrated parasite management consistently outperforms calendar-based deworming. Regular rotation reduces exposure, maintaining adequate sward height keeps animals away from larval zones and selecting animals that tolerate parasite pressure strengthens the herd or flock over time.

Monitoring body condition through winter is also important. Losses can be difficult to detect under winter hair or wool, and small declines now often surface later as reduced conception rates or slower recovery once grass begins growing.

Through all of this, simplicity remains a strength. The temptation is either to overhaul the entire operation or to change nothing at all. Yet the grazing principles that worked decades ago remain sound today: maintain adequate residual, protect the soil with residue, match stocking rate to forage supply, keep animals moving, promote diversity, avoid overgrazing and observe the land closely.

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Reliable water access, functional fencing, balanced stocking rates and livestock suited to their environment matter far more than the latest gadget or formula. Grazing remains both art and science—observant, flexible and grounded in fundamentals.

It requires clear reflection and a willingness to make a few well-chosen adjustments that will pay dividends throughout the year. With refined goals and a strengthened system, the 2026 grazing season can begin on firm ground, regardless of what follows. It is not about maximizing a single grazing event but about optimizing the entire grazing season. Keep on grazing!

Beef Magazine

CREEP FEEDING BEEF CALVES: PROFIT OR EXPENSE?

Supplemental feeding helps bridge nutrient gaps and boost weaning weights when guided by calf needs, pasture quality, and feed economics.

Creep feeding provides supplemental feed to nursing calves while preventing cow access to the feeder. The goal is to maximize calf growth prior to weaning by supplying additional nutrients that milk and forage alone may not provide. However, a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't exist. Your plan should be guided by calf nutrient needs, pasture quality, cow milk yield, and feed costs.

Why Consider Creep Feeding?

By the time a calf reaches 3 to 4 months of age, a lactating beef cow may only provide half of the nutrients required for that calf to maximize growth. While forage contributes to the remainder of the nutrients, it may fall short in energy or protein—especially as pasture quality declines mid- to late-season. Creep feeding fills this nutritional gap, particularly in calves with high genetic potential for growth or in operations where higher weaning weights directly increase revenue.

- Creep feeding is useful under the following conditions:
- Calves are born early in the season and nursing into late summer or fall when forage quality drops.
- Drought or limited feed inventory forces an earlier nutritional intervention.
- There is an economic advantage to heavier calves at sale time.
- High calf prices paired with low feed prices.

Nutrient Design of Creep Feeds

Young calves have limited rumen capacity and won't consume large quantities of feed, so nutrient density of the feed is key. Most commercial creep feeds are pelleted for palatability and ease of handling. If mixing your own ration:

- Keep the feed dust-free and well-mixed to prevent sorting.
- If using liquid ingredients, make sure they do not clog the feeder.
- Roll or coarsely crack grains (rather than finely grind) to reduce dust and potential for digestive upset.

An ideal creep feed includes a balanced blend of neutral detergent fiber (NDF) and crude protein, allowing for both rumen development and lean tissue growth, plus additional energy (TDN) to help facilitate the growth. Common formulations target crude protein concentrations between 14% and 16%, though protein requirements will vary depending on forage quality and calf performance goals. Rapidly growing, young calves have a high requirement for protein, specifically in the form of rumen undegradable protein (RUP), so creep feeds high in protein in the form of RUP will facilitate frame and muscle growth. An example of a feedstuff high in RUP is distillers' grains. Monensin may be added to enhance feed efficiency and reduce coccidiosis, but dosing must match intake projections and follow on-label requirements for the product.

Management Tips for Successful Creep Feeding

- Introduce early: It can take calves 2–3 weeks to adjust to creep feed. Start before the period of greatest pasture decline.
- Location matters: Place creep feeders in areas where cows and calves naturally congregate, like near water or shade.
- Encourage intake: Use hay or familiar feedstuffs to attract calves to the feeder initially.
- Keep feed clean: Fresh, palatable feed minimizes waste and promotes consistent intake.
- Bunk space: Provide 4–6 inches of bunk space per calf. For example, an 8-foot feeder with access on both sides equates to 16 linear feet of bunk space and can accommodate 30-50 calves.
- Keep critters out: Creep feeders can be a place that pests (rodents, raccoons, birds, etc.) may congregate – watch out for signs that pests have gotten into your feed.

Economic Considerations

- The profitability of creep feeding depends on three main factors:
- Cost of feed per pound of gain
- Market price of additional calf weight
- Feed conversion efficiency (feed-to-gain ratio)

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In general, feed-to-gain ratios for beef calves range from 4:1 to 10:1, with 8:1 feed conversion as a suitable average with creep feed included in the diet. This feed conversion is dependent on the quality of the forage and the value of the dam's milk. Previous literature on the feed conversion of creep feed fed on its own (without forage or milk) would suggest that creep feeds higher in protein return a more efficient conversion, usually in the range of 4:1 to 5:1 and creep feeds higher in starch (lower in protein) have less efficient conversion. If feed costs are low and calf prices are high, creep feeding is more likely to be profitable. Conversely, high feed costs or limited price premiums for heavier calves reduce margins. You can calculate the cost of gain from creep feeding using the table below:

Example Calculation to Determine the Value of Creep Feeding[a]			
	1	2	
	No Creep	Creep	Formula
A Weaning weight, lb.	500	565	
B. Amount of creep feed fed per calf[b], lb		520	(A2-A1) x 8
C. Sale calf price, $/lb	4.25[c]	4.10	
D. Calf Value, $	2,125	2,316.5	A x C
E. Value of added calf weight, $/lb		2.95	(D2-D1)/(A2-A1)
F. Value of added gain, ($)		191.5	(A2-A1) x E2
G. Creep feed price per ton delivered, $		360	
H. Creep feed price per pound delivered, $		0.18	G2/2000 lb
I. Cost of creep feed fed, $ per calf		93.60	B2 x H2
J. Return per head from creep feeding, $		97.90[a]	F2 -I2

Creep feeding should be evaluated not only based on feed cost but also market trends and how added weight affects calf sale prices. Heavier calves often receive a lower price per pound—a concept known as the "price slide." In addition, offering a high energy creep feed that makes calves too fleshy may cause a price reduction at time of sale. Data from Merck Animal Health and Superior Livestock Auction reported that leaner 5-cwt (average weight 572 lb) calves marketed in 2024 brought an average of $14/head more than fleshier calves, highlighting the importance of managing fleshing condition of calves.

Summary

Creep feeding is a flexible management tool that can improve calf growth and add weight prior to marketing. Yet, it should be used strategically. Assess pasture quality, milk production, feed costs, and labor availability before committing. In some cases, early weaning may be more effective than prolonged creep feeding—particularly during drought conditions or when cow body condition is a concern.

If calves are retained for 100 days or more post-weaning, creep feeding may not be necessary. Over time, non-creep-fed calves will typically catch up in weight to those that were creep-fed. However, offering creep feed for about 30 days prior to weaning can help bunk-train calves, making the transition to weaning smoother and less stressful.

Always consider:

- Genetic potential of your herd
- Pasture conditions throughout the season
- Cost-benefit of feeding days and intake rates
- Nutrient balance (protein vs energy) in the creep feed as to keep calves from getting too fleshy
- What your end goal is: Retention, backgrounding, market weight.

With the right strategy in place, creep feeding can be a powerful addition to your beef production system if the revenue received for additional pounds at time of sale overcome the cost of the feed to achieve the additional gain.

Beef Magazine

VITAMIN A: THE CALF'S INHERITANCE

A cow needs good vitamin A status and intake to build a strong inheritance for her calf and ensure adequate levels in colostrum.

As a required micronutrient, vitamin A is well worth its pretty penny. Newborn calves are born with very little vitamin A due to a lack of placental transfer (Baker et al., 1953). Without vitamin A, calves are extremely susceptible to immune challenges like scours/diarrhea or respiratory disease (Stewart and McCallum, 1938; Kume and Toharmat, 2001). Additionally, calves can display other vitamin A deficiency symptoms like poor vision or reduced growth.

Calves receive the vitamin A they need from colostrum – think about it as their inheritance. Colostrum is fortified with vitamin A from a combination of the dam's vitamin A stores in her liver (40%) and her current vitamin A intake (60%; Branstetter et al., 1973; Tomlinson et al., 1974). Using the generational wealth analogy, let's call the dam's liver vitamin A her savings account and her current vitamin A intake her income. To build a strong inheritance for her calf and ensure there is adequate vitamin A in the colostrum, the cow needs both good vitamin A status and vitamin A intake. But how does she accrue those savings and earn that daily vitamin A income?

Vitamin A stores (savings) are built up over the summer months due to the consumption of fresh pasture, which is rich in beta carotene. Beta carotene is a precursor to vitamin A and is able to be converted to vitamin A in the cow's intestine (Goodman et al., 1967). Green pasture is the most rich in beta carotene, followed by green alfalfa hay, then grass hay and, lastly, corn silage and other corn products (cracked corn, distillers grains; Maynard, 1979). Beta carotene is quickly degraded due to oxidation and light, resulting in a lower concentration in stored forages and feedstuffs.

The current NASEM (2016) guidelines for vitamin A likely assume cows have consumed good green grass for several months before the winter feeding period. However, as of Nov. 18, 2025, 33% of the cow inventory in the U.S. was in a drought area (U.S. Department of Agriculture). While Iowa thankfully is not under widespread drought currently, we have had many recent years of drought where cows may not be accruing those summer savings as expected.

As cows move into late gestation, which aligns with the winter months for those with spring calving herds, vitamin A intake (income) is more crucial than ever. Winter feeding often means a heavy reliance on stored forages, which may have low vitamin A concentrations. During this time, the calf is experiencing significant in utero growth, and colostrum formation is beginning.

Gestating beef cows are recommended to have at minimum approximately 33,000 IU supplemental vitamin A per day (1,300 IU/lb. dry matter). Recent research shows that this recommendation is likely too low to result in an increase in the vitamin A status of young calves (Speer et al., 2024). This same research suggests producers should aim to have vitamin A intakes of approximately 90,000 IU per day (3,900 IU/lb. dry matter) to increase the inheritance to the calf.

As we enter the winter months, there are key considerations producers should have in mind to ensure their cows have adequate vitamin A to pass on to their calves:

- What is your hay quality like? Nice green grass hay, or fairly brown, old hay?
- Has your hay been tested? (Remember, you can work with your local field specialist to borrow a hay probe and learn how to sample!)
- What is your free choice mineral consumption like throughout the year? If cows are going through mineral quicker than they should, you may have a problem that can be exacerbated when cows are moved into closer quarters (dry lot, confinement).
- What is the vitamin A concentration in your mineral?
- When are your cows due to calve? Vitamin A supplementation needs to be at least adequate during late gestation to provide the generational wealth.

If you have concerns about your hay quality or vitamin A supplementation, please reach out to your local extension specialist. Don't leave those newborn calves susceptible to disease due to a lack of vitamin A. This mighty micronutrient is worth every penny to deliver the best inheritance to the calf and give you a strong, healthy, vigorous calf.

Beef Magazine

AUGUSTA CO-OP A1 BEEF MINERAL

Consistent mineral intake is critical to supply your cattle with daily nutrition of key elements to help meet nutrient requirements year-round. Augusta Co-op A1 minerals provide consistent mineral intake that ensures bioavailability, palatability, predictability and weatherability.

A1 "Basic" Mineral

The 'Basic' tier has basic weatherization to help prevent mineral from clumping. Contains a blend of oxide and sulfate mineral sources.

- A1-9448 Hi Mag
- A1-9449 "Stocker" option
- A1-9450 w/Rumensin – Use for grinding in feed on farm. Rumensin for coccidiosis control and feed efficiency.
- A1-9451 w/Garlic – Garlic as a fly control option.

A1 "Choice" Mineral

The 'Choice' tier has improved weatherization to help prevent mineral from clumping. 50% organic selenium, 50/50 blend of sulfate and Intellibond mineral sources.

- A1-9452 Hi Mag
- A1-9453 Hi Mag w/Clarifly for fly control

A1 "Prime" Mineral

The 'Prime' tier provides the best weatherization to help prevent mineral from clumping, 100% organic selenium, 50/50 blend of sulfate and organic mineral sources.

- A1-9454 Hi Mag
- A1-9455 Hi Mag w/Clarifly for fly control

											Mineral Sources					Fly Control		Medicated?	
Product Name	SKU	Ca %	P %	Salt %	Mg %	Vit A IU/lb	Vit E IU/lb	Cu (ppm)	Zn (ppm)	Se (ppm)	Oxides	Sulfates	Intellibonds	Organics	Organic Se Source?	Garlic	Clarifly	Rumensin	Weatherization?
A1 Basic Hi Mag	A1-9448	13.5-16.2	2 (min)	20.2-24.2	10	150,000	50	500	2500	26	+	+							Good
A1 Basic	A1-9449	12.6-15.1	4 (min)	21.6-25.9	5	154,300	50	500	2500	26	+	+							Good
A1 Basic w/ Rumensin	A1-9450	12.6-15.1	4 (min)	21.6-25.9	5	154,300	50	500	2500	26	+	+						+	Good
A1 Basic w/ Garlic	A1-9451	13.3-15.9	2 (min)	20.2-24.24	10	150,000	50	500	2500	26	+	+				+			Good
A1 Choice Hi Mag	A1-9452	12.6-15.1	2 (min)	18.0-21.6	12	204,300	100	1000	3500	26		+	+		50%				Better
A1 Choice Hi Mag w/ Clarifly	A1-9453	12.5-15.0	2 (min)	18.0-19.6	12	200,000	100	1000	3500	26		+	+		50%		+		Better
A1 Prime Hi Mag	A1-9454	10.8-12.9	3 (min)	17.1-20.5	12	250,000	200	1500	3500	26		+		+	100%				Best
A1 Prime Hi Mag w/ Clarifly	A1-9455	10.8-12.9	3 (min)	17.1-20.5	12	250,000	200	1500	3500	26		+		+	100%		+		Best

*shaded color corresponds to tag color

Vendor Day

Augusta Cooperative Farm Bureau, Inc.

Wednesday, February 25 • 4 PM - 7 PM

Blue Ridge Community College - Plecker Center
57 College Ln, Weyers Cave, VA 24486

The largest farming brands on site in one location! Book your 2026 items at drastically reduced rates at our annual vendor day. Door prizes, goody bags, snacks, & deals galore!

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Coupon valid February 9, 2026 through February 28, 2026. Coupon must be present at time of checkout to receive discount. Limit one coupon per customer. Coupon valid for one in-store sales transaction only. Cannot be combined with other coupons, sales or discounts. In-stock items only. Not redeemable for cash. Not valid for feed, seed, YETI, gift card purchases or animal health products.

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Save now on trusted cattle health brands from PYRAMID® 5 + PRESPONSE® SQ to LONGRANGE® and more.

March 1 – April 30, 2026

Scan to submit your Cattle First Rebate.

EVENTS / CALENDAR

VENDOR DAY

Wednesday, February 25 • 4:00 pm - 7:00 pm

Blue Ridge Community College - Plecker Center
57 College Ln, Weyers Cave, VA 24486
The largest farming brands on site in one location! Book your 2026 items at drastically reduced rates at our annual vendor day! Door prizes, goody bags, snacks, and deals galore!

Scan to view event details

AGRONOMY CUSTOMER APPRECIATION DAY

Friday, February 6 • 11 am - 2 pm

Augusta Expo - Building 2
277 Expo Rd | Fishersville, VA 22939
Additional information: RSVP to Staci Alger at (540) 885-1265 x 253 or SAlger@AugustaCoop.com