

Farmnote

Cattle Production: A comparison of methods for settling weaners into new locations when cross-weaning

From 1990 to 1998, Cunyu Station, a 372,000 ha property north-east of Wiluna, was the site for an animal production study designed to record information from a pastoral cattle herd. The project assessed many aspects of beef cattle production, and an area of focus included weaning.

One aspect of weaning that was monitored and analysed, was the movement of animals following removal from their mothers. Combinations of cross-weaning and home-weaning, both to paddocks and yards, provided an opportunity to assess a practical aspect of this management activity. Table 1 describes the percentage of animals remaining in their weaning locality following weaning.

Table 1: Comparison of animal movements following home-weaning and cross-weaning

Type of weaning	% remaining in weaning locality
Home-weaning	94.1%
Cross-weaning - nearby	86.2%
Cross-weaning - across station	73.7%

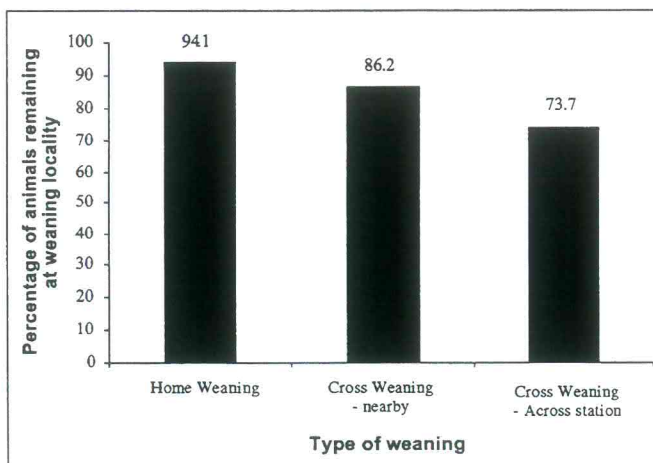


Figure 1: Comparison of animal movements following home-weaning and cross-weaning.

Observations at Cunyu indicate that the majority of animals subjected to cross-weaning do not wander large distances from their new locations, and are re-mustered within 10 km of the release point. The risk of weaners moving on, getting lost, and then perishing is low.

In all cases, a small number will wander from their weaning location. It is also apparent that as the distance over which weaners are moved becomes larger, the number of weaners moving from their new locations tends to increase. In addition to this, animals weaned initially into square mile paddocks seem to be more likely to remain in their new locations compared to those animals weaned into yards and fed hay.

Table 2: Comparison of animal movements following weaning into paddocks versus yards.

Type of weaning	% remaining in weaning locality following yard weaning & paddock weaning	
	Weaned in square mile paddock	Weaned in yards - fed hay
Homeweaning	95%	83%
Crossweaning - nearby	88%	-
Crossweaning - across station	80%	58%

This is an important observation as the process of yarding weaners for a period of time is often considered an effective means of settling them into a new region. The idea behind weaning to paddocks as opposed to yards at Cunyu was that it would enable animals to establish social groups, helping them settle into the new area without the mothers being around. Weaners also have a greater chance to learn to fend for themselves as a group of animals, as opposed to being on their own.

Infrastructure

Weaning is an activity that demands significant manpower. With only two permanent staff members on Cunyu, weaning

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programs would be impossible to undertake effectively without some kind of permanent infrastructure to assist the process.

The development of infrastructure such as receiving yards and adjoining square mile paddocks are considered to have been critical in streamlining the process. This infrastructure has also played an important role in settling young animals into new locations during their cross weaning experience.

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