The effect of backgrounding systems on helminth load and serum haptoglobin profile of weaned Angus calves

B. Omontese¹, DVM, PhD, MPA; S. Felix², DVM, MSc; F. Zakari³, DVM, MSc
¹Food and Animal Sciences, Alabama A&M University, Normal, AL 35762
²Artificial Insemination Unit, National Animal Production Research Institute, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria-Nigeria
³Department of Veterinary Physiology, Biochemistry and Pharmacology, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Jos, Jos, Nigeria

Introduction
The backgrounding (BKG) segment in beef cattle production systems is characterized by a huge variation in diet type which could affect average daily gain, finishing performance and carcass traits. Internal parasitism of feedlot cattle has been reported to reduce performance and impair immune function through deprivation of host nutrient, allergic reactions and blood loss. Serum haptoglobin may be used as a marker of stress response in beef calves. This study examined the helminth burden and serum haptoglobin profile of weaned beef calves backgrounded using different feedstuff. We hypothesized that helminth load and serum haptoglobin profiles would differ in calves assigned to different backgrounding systems.

Materials and methods
Apparently healthy Angus calves (n = 36) with mean body weight of 229 ± 18.6 kg were randomly assigned to 1 of 3 backgrounding systems for 55 days: 1) calves fed ration in a dry lot: DRYLOT (DL); 2) calves fed perennial pasture vegetation within rotational paddocks: PASTURE (PP) and 3) calves fed cover crop within a strip plot: CROP (CC). All calves were treated with Safeguard® containing Fenbendazole on day 0 (initiation of backgrounding). Fecal samples were collected at the beginning (d0), middle (d28) and end of the backgrounding (d55) and were analyzed individually using the Mini-FLOTAC technique with a detection limit of 5 eggs per gram (EPG) of feces. Also, blood samples were collected, serum harvested and used for measurement of haptoglobin concentrations. Data was analyzed using GraphPad 9.00.

Results
Average FEC EPG count (mean ± SD) at the beginning, middle and end of backgrounding was 7.833±2.71, 3.00 ± 3.08 and 0.167 ± 0.39 EPG, respectively. Calves assigned to PP had a greater (P < 0.05) haptoglobin concentrations during (12.42 ± 5.143 mg/dl) and at the end (22 ± 26.73 mg/dl) of backgrounding compared with CC (during: 10.08 ± 1.165mg/dl and end: 9.833 ± 4.108mg/dl) and DL (during: 9.08 ± 1.93 mg/dl and end: 12.75 ± 15.9 mg/dl). However, PP calves had a smaller (P < 0.05) fecal egg counts during (1.083 ± 1.98 EPG) backgrounding compared with CC (5.333 ± 0.62 EPG). Regardless of backgrounding system, fecal egg counts were greater (P < 0.05) at the beginning compared with during and at the end of backgrounding.

Significance
We concluded that backgrounding systems influenced fecal egg counts and haptoglobin concentrations in weaned Angus calves. Further study to evaluate the effects of helminth load and related stress during backgrounding on growth and finishing performance of beef calves is warranted.