

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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In this Issue

Cattle Markets Marking Time For the New Year

By Derrell S. Peel, OSU Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

Night Time versus Day Time Feeding Influences Time of Calving

by Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Animal Reproduction Specialist

Cattle Markets Marking Time For the New Year

by Derrell Peel

It seems like cattle markets are pretty well set to ride the rest of December and wait and see what 2007 brings. Fed cattle markets have not shown much of a sense of direction for a couple of weeks. While both feedlots and packers are likely not happy with their margins neither is in a position to take control and really move fed cattle prices. Weak boxed beef prices are keeping a tight lid on packer revenue and making it difficult for packers to run good volumes and thereby manage costs better. Feedlots have sufficient supplies of ready cattle to prevent any upside leverage on fed prices but continue to market a minimally acceptable level of cattle so as not to get seriously backed up. Without some significant shock from outside the market, I expect to see the market coast through the holidays before trying to regain momentum in the New Year.

Feeder cattle markets have stabilized after adjusting sharply to higher corn prices. Corn markets appear to be holding steady for the time being and therefore feeder cattle do not need to make any additional downward adjustments. In fact, I expect that it will become increasingly apparent after January 1 that feeder supplies will be very tight in the first half of 2007 and feeder markets will likely recover somewhat. Nevertheless, high corn prices will keep feeder prices lower than previously expected.

There are several factors to keep an eye on in 2007. First, we will be very interested to see the annual cattle inventory numbers and see what impact 2006 had on the cattle cycle. That will have considerable potential to set the general tone in 2007 and beyond. Beyond that, beef demand and feed markets are among the most critical factors to influence markets and the most likely sources of volatility. Trade is likely to be more of a slow but steady kind of influence barring some sort of new market disruption. Finally, the extent of drought recovery will have a lot to do with how quickly herd expansion regains momentum. Weather could be a bigger than usual factor in 2007 with respect to both forage conditions and feed markets.

Night Time versus Day Time Feeding Influences Time of Calving

by Glenn Selk

It is generally accepted that adequate supervision at calving has a significant impact on reducing calf mortality. Adequate supervision has been of increasing importance with the use of larger beef breeds and cattle with larger birth weights. On most ranching operations, supervision of the first calf heifers will be best accomplished in daylight hours and the poorest observation takes place in the middle of the night.

The easiest and most practical method of inhibiting nighttime calving at present is by feeding cows at night. The physiological mechanism is unknown, but some hormonal effect may be involved. Rumen motility studies indicate the frequency of rumen contractions falls a few hours before parturition. Intraruminal pressure begins to fall in the last 2 weeks of gestation, with a more rapid decline during calving. It has been suggested that night feeding causes intraruminal pressures to rise at night and decline in the daytime.

In a Canadian study of 104 Hereford cows 38.4% of a group fed at 8:00 am and again at 3:00 pm delivered calves during the day, 79.6% of a group fed at 11:00 am and 9:00 pm delivered calves during the day. A British study utilizing 162 cattle on 4 farms compared the percentages of calves born from 5:00 am to 10:00 pm to cows fed at different times. When cattle were fed at 9:00 am, 57% of the calves were born during the day, vs 79% with feeding at 10:00 pm. In field trials by cattlemen utilizing night feeding when 35 cows and heifers were fed once daily between 5:00 pm and 7:00 pm, 74.5% of the calves were born between 5:00 am and 5:00 pm. In the most convincing study to date, 1331 cows on 15 farms in Iowa were fed once daily at dusk, 85% of the calves were born between 6:00 am and 6:00 pm. Whether cows were started on the night feeding the week before first expected calving, OR 2 to 3 weeks earlier, made no apparent difference in calving patterns.

On many large ranches, it is physically impossible to feed all of the cows after 5:00 pm. In those instances, the ranch manager should plan to feed the mature cows earlier in the day, then feed the first calf heifers at dusk. The heifers, of course, are the group of females that are of greatest need of observation during the calving season.

Various means have been employed to effectively reduce animal loss at calving time. Skilled personnel should be available to render obstetric assistance and neonatal care to maximize percentage calf crop weaned in the cattle operation. Currently, evening feeding of cattle seems to be the most effective method of scheduling parturition so assistance can be available during daylight hours. Calves born in daylight also have the added benefit of warmer air temperatures and on sunny days absorbing radiant heat from the sunshine.

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