

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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In this Issue

Oklahoma Update: Wheat Pasture, Rain and Green Grass

By Derrell S. Peel, OSU Livestock Marketing Specialist

Check the thaw thermos carefully before Artificial Insemination season begins

By Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Animal Reproduction Spec.

Care of Newly Purchased Young Bulls

By Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Animal Reproduction Spec.

Oklahoma Update: Wheat Pasture, Rain and Green Grass

By Derrell S. Peel

“Move those cattle” is the word from OSU Extension Wheat Specialist, Jeff Edwards. Most wheat varieties are at First Hollow Stem (FHS) across Oklahoma except for the Panhandle. Some varieties are well past FHS and each day of additional grazing now is decreasing wheat yields. The combined auction volume this week was down from last week but still large at nearly 44,000 head. Prices are strong for lightweight, thin cattle for grazing and heavy feeders for feedlot placement.

Much of Oklahoma received some rain last weekend although amounts north of Interstate 40 were generally small. The rain is a great help to the wheat crop and to pastures in the southern part of the state that are greening up rapidly. In other areas, the pastures are not growing much yet and the moisture may well evaporate before it gets used. Anecdotal reports around the state are that many cows are thin and in relatively poor condition and producers are concerned about reproductive management this year. Many pastures are also in relatively poor condition and producers have significant management considerations to allow both cows and pastures to recuperate. If it turns off dry, the management decisions will be critical and will have to be made quickly.

Check the thaw thermos carefully before Artificial Insemination season begins

By Glenn Selk

Producers that utilize artificial insemination in their breeding program must pay close attention to detail to achieve high reproductive rates. One of the details that is often overlooked is the proper thaw temperature of the water in the thaw thermos that is available to bring semen straws up to the correct temperature. Most AI companies still recommend that the water in the thaw thermos be 95 to 98 degrees Fahrenheit. When the temperature in the thaw thermos goes significantly above that range, fertility of the semen being thawed may decrease.

As we conducted AI Refresher Clinics around the state of Oklahoma in past years, we have checked the thermometers in the thaw thermos of many producers. About one of every 10 of these thermos thermometers was incorrect by 10 or more degrees F. In nearly every case, the problem thermometer was a "dial" thermometer, and could have been the culprit in lower conception rates at the owner's farm or ranch. Therefore producers need to check these thermometers before each breeding season against a reliable mercury type thermometer. The dial thermometer can be adjusted by using a box end wrench on the collar below the dial and then with vice-grips or pliers turning the rim of the dial to return the thermometer to the correct setting. Over heating the semen during the thaw process, can reduce pregnancy rates.

Care of Newly Purchased Young Bulls

By Glenn Selk

Young bulls that are purchased at production sales are often in "good" body condition. Lets face it, well conditioned bulls look better on sale day and sell better. Gain tested bulls have been fed for maximum gain while on test. Both of these scenarios, make commercial cow calf producers wonder about fertility and libido of these young sires when they are turned out in a pasture with a group of cycling females and very little, if any, grain in sight.

Research at Kansas State University has illustrated that young "gain-tested" bulls have normal fertility and libido when allowed to return gradually to moderate fleshiness and hearty physical condition before the breeding season. In fact, many performance-tested bulls from central test stations are returned to the owner's ranch after the gain test in order that they be allowed to be properly conditioned before the sale date. Test station sales usually offer bulls that completed their gain test about 6 months previously.

Any rancher that purchases a young, highly fitted or conditioned bull should plan to gradually reduce the fleshiness of the bull before the breeding season. To let these bulls down, it is a good practice to start them on a ration that is not too dissimilar to the one they have been accustomed to but that is 60 to 70 percent of their previous intake. The amount of grain can be reduced at the rate of about 10 percent per week until the desired

level is achieved. At the same time, substitutions should be made in the form of light, bulky feeds--such as oats or alfalfa hay. Ideally, this letdown should be completed prior to the time bulls are turned out. Dramatic nutritional changes can have an adverse effect on semen production, so it is important that these ration modifications be done gradually. Producers need to try to keep the total diet of these young bulls at, or near, 12% crude protein. Allow the change of diets to take place gradually, instead of allowing a rapid condition and weight loss during the first of the breeding season, which could be reflected in a reduced calf crop next year.

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