

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

March 9, 2007

In this Issue

Cattle markets and spring temperatures both heating up in Oklahoma

By Derrell S. Peel, OSU Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

Early weaning may be an option for thin spring calving cows

By Glenn Selk and David Lalman, OSU Extension Cattle Specialists

Cattle markets and spring temperatures both heating up in Oklahoma

By Derrell S. Peel, OSU Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

Large feeder cattle auction totals in Oklahoma the past two weeks likely means that the bulk of the wheat pasture run is over. The total for the last two weeks for the 8 federally reported Oklahoma auctions was almost 99,000 head, which is down about four percent from the same two weeks last year.

After the serious drop in feedlot placements in January, there has been a question of how much February placements might make up for January. In the month of February, Oklahoma auctions totals were down 9 percent from 2006. This could well mean that February placements will still be small although nowhere near the decrease seen in January. For the year to date, the feeder cattle auction total in Oklahoma is down 29 percent compared to last year.

It appears that spring has sprung in Oklahoma and temperatures have warmed significantly. Typical windy conditions have also returned and we have had some, mostly small, fires in recent days. The latest Drought Monitor map would suggest that drought conditions in Oklahoma have moderated significantly over the winter. However, the Oklahoma Mesonet site confirms that most of Oklahoma has received less than 50 percent of normal precipitation in the past 30 days. These warm, windy days mean that dry conditions will develop again very quickly without forthcoming moisture. Oklahoma is extremely vulnerable to short forage conditions with virtually no hay stocks remaining and resuming drought conditions just around the corner.

Nevertheless, fed and feeder cattle markets have strengthened sharply the last two weeks. Fed cattle and boxed beef are being helped by the continuing aftereffects of the

winter storms that disrupted feedlots in December and January. And despite the potential for drought, there is considerable interest in summer stockers as the market is clearly adjusting feeder prices to favor forage based gains. In Oklahoma, that interest may fade quickly if it does not rain soon.

Cow-calf producers likewise have significant management considerations this spring which will only get more critical without moisture. Many cows in Oklahoma suffered with prolonged periods of cold and severe weather, often with moderate or worse quality hay. Many cows are nowhere close to ideal body condition and that may become more apparent after calving. I suspect we will have more problems getting cows rebred this spring and that diminished productivity will have impacts locally and perhaps nationally well into 2008 and likely into 2009.

Early weaning may be an option for thin spring calving cows

By Glenn Selk and David Lalman, OSU Extension Cattle Specialists

The short forage supplies caused by the drought of 2006 were diminished even more by the snow and ice of the winter of 2006-2007. The end result may be cows that are calving in thinner body condition than would be ideal for optimum rebreeding performance.

Early weaning of calves from thin cows

Early weaning of calves at 6 to 8 weeks of age is an effective way to get high rebreeding rates even in very thin cows. Although, early weaning is certainly not advocated for all producers all of the time, it can provide an attractive alternative in certain situations such as drought, when large amounts of purchased forage would be necessary to maintain a cow herd through to normal weaning time or when cows are already too thin to rebreed. Research results indicated that thin two-year old heifers that were early weaned had a rebreeding percentage of 97%, compared to 59% for counterparts that were normally suckled until the following October. Studies at Oklahoma State University show that early-weaned calves can be efficiently raised to a normal weaning weight with minimal labor and facilities.

Why early weaning works

Lactation roughly doubles the daily energy and protein requirement for a typical beef cow. Removing the calf at six to eight weeks into lactation obviously reduces the quantity and quality of forage needed to maintain the cow herd. Reasons for improved rebreeding after early weaning involve more than nutrition, however. Research has shown that the removal of the nursing calf causes hormonal changes in the cows that stimulate estrus. The suckling stimulus (each time a calf nurses) is a nervous system signal that tends to restrict the release of the hormones that allows the cow to return to estrus cycles. Estrus

activity can then be induced, by early weaning, in cows too thin to cycle while still suckling a calf.

Age for early weaning

In order to maintain a 365-day calving interval, calves should be early weaned at less than 80 days of age. About 40 days of age may be a practical minimum for early weaning in beef herds. Calves at least 40 days old do not require milk replacers in the ration and are old enough to eat dry feed. Since smaller and younger calves may have difficulty competing for feed and water, the age range in any given group of early-weaned calves should be kept as narrow as possible.

Care of the “early-weaned calf”

An Oklahoma State University Extension Fact Sheet F-3264 “Early Weaning for the Beef Herd” by Dr. David Lalman gives details of self fed rations for early weaned calves and health considerations for these young animals. It is available on line at:

<http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-1928/F-3264web.pdf>

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This includes but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services.