

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Observe Bulls Closely as Breeding Season Begins

Breeding seasons for fall-calving herds will begin in late November and early December. A good manager keeps an eye on his bulls during the breeding season to make sure that they are getting the cows inseminated. Occasionally a bull that has passed a Breeding Soundness Exam may have difficulty serving cows in heat, especially after heavy service. Breeding Soundness Exams cannot evaluate bull libido. Such problems can best be detected by observing bulls while they work. "Libido" or sex drive refers to the desire to mate and is thought to be a highly heritable trait in cattle. Remember that semen quality and scrotal circumference are not related to libido. Therefore, a bull that passes a Breeding Soundness Evaluation may have poor libido, or a bull with good libido may fail a Breeding Soundness Evaluation.

Therefore producers should (if at all possible) watch bulls breed cows during the first part of each breeding season. If problems are apparent, the bull can be replaced while salvaging the remainder of the breeding season and next year's calf crop. Likewise a small proportion of bulls can wear out from heavy service during the breeding season and lose interest. These, too, will need to be replaced. The greater the number of cows allotted to each bull in the breeding pasture the more critical it is that every bull be ready to work every day of the breeding season.

Injuries to bulls during the breeding season are relatively common. When a bull becomes lame or incapable of breeding, because of an injury to his reproductive tract, he needs to be removed from the breeding pasture and replaced with another bull.

Feedlots Placed More Yearlings in September

For a year now the feedlot industry has been asking for additional heavyweight feeder cattle to place in feedlots. The sharp rise in feedgrain prices this time last year and the

resulting increases in feedlot cost of gain have increased the demand for yearling cattle relative to lightweight feeder cattle. Simultaneously, the increase in heavy feeder prices relative to calf prices has increased the incentives for forage-based stocker gains.

The latest USDA Cattle on Feed report showed that September placements were 109 percent of one year ago. In many ways this reflects the first chance that the market has had to respond to the signals that started one year ago. It was difficult to provide increased numbers of heavy feeders last winter and spring, especially given the dry conditions and lack of wheat pasture last year. Placements were low this summer as the growing season provided the first significant opportunity for taking feeder cattle to heavier weights on forage and it is those cattle that were placed in September. Not only were placements higher in September but placement weights were higher as well. Placements weighing over 700 pounds were up nearly 20 percent while placements that weighed less than 700 pounds were down 1.5 percent. It has taken a year, but the industry has now transitioned almost entirely to a yearling based flow of feeder cattle.

Feedlot marketings in September were 97 percent of last year and the October 1 on-feed inventory was 10.967 million head, down 3.7 percent from last year. Although the marketings number is less than last year, it should be noted that marketings as a percent of total inventory was higher than last year. That will likely be the case for the foreseeable future because yearlings will need less days on feed and the feedlot turnover rate will increase. Regional impacts are still apparent in cattle feeding as well. Of the major cattle feeding states, only Iowa and South Dakota feedlot inventories were up year over year, while all other Midwest and Plains states reported smaller feedlot inventories.

There will continue to be an incentive for forage-based based gains as long as feedlots keep looking for heavy feeder cattle to place. The lack of wheat pasture in the Southern Plains means that more cattle will remain in other stocker and backgrounding programs around the country this winter.