

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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In this Issue

Moisture and Feeder Market Incentives

By Derrell S. Peel, OSU Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

Cattle Care After the Storm

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Moisture and Feeder Market Incentives

By Derrell S. Peel

Most of Oklahoma has continued to receive moisture and much of the state is well above normal precipitation totals for the last month. All but the eastern quarter of the state is slightly above average for the total this “water year”, which began after the growing season last fall. Spring and early summer forage and hay production is assured now although more precipitation will be required to follow through with anything like a normal complete year. Forage conditions and producer morale have both improved immensely.

National totals suggest that we continue to slaughter large numbers of cows thus suggesting that herd expansion is still on hold. However, I suspect that Oklahoma will begin holding both cows and heifers to recover from last year’s drought liquidation. Year to date totals indicate that cows and bulls moving through auctions is down nearly 23 percent from last year. There seems to be enough confidence about summer forage production that producers are beginning to retain both cows and heifers. I would not be surprised to see the national cow slaughter total begin to decline relative to last year over the next few weeks.

Calf prices in Oklahoma are at or slightly above the levels this same time last year. In fact, some people are saying that high-priced corn is not having much impact on cattle markets. The fact is that feeder cattle prices have recovered, despite high corn prices, for other reasons, most notably the strength in fed cattle prices, reduced cattle imports, demand for summer grazing and probably some heifer retention. Feeder prices would be even higher were it not for corn prices.

The impact of high corn prices is exactly as one would expect: the incentive is building to retain stocker cattle to heavier weights before placing them on feed in feedlots. This time last year, Oklahoma City feeder prices showed that the value of stocker gain for steers from 475 to 625 pounds was about \$0.85/pound. At that time, however, the value of gain for steers from 625 to 775 was less than \$0.05/pound. Corn was still cheap and the incentive was to move those cattle

into the feedlot early and lighter. In April 2007, the value of stocker gain from 475 to 625 was about \$0.65/pound and the value of gain from 625 to 775 was \$0.54/pound. Moreover, there is relatively little rollback on steer prices up to 950 pounds at the current time. The incentive is clear: the market is encouraging more forage-based stocker gains and heavier placement weights for cattle entering feedlots. This has implications for stocker producers and for cow-calf producers who should be evaluating retained ownership through the stocker phase.

Cattle Care After the Storm

Compiled by Glenn Selk

Spring time is thunderstorm season across the Plains. Spring storms occasionally bring severe winds or even tornadoes. Cleaning up after a severe storm is difficult enough. Losing valuable cattle brings additional financial hardship to the situation.

Cattle loss can occur in several scenarios. Livestock may be killed, lost, or stolen during a stormy situation. An accurate accounting of livestock and property is essential to a cattle operation's storm preparedness. Keep a CURRENT inventory of all animals and the pastures where they are located. Individual animal ID tags on all animals have several other purposes, but can become extremely valuable if cattle become scattered or even stolen. If these records are computer based, consider having a "back-up" copy stored at a neighbor's or a relative's house.

The Texas A&M Extension Disaster Education Network has an excellent fact sheet by David W. Smith (Extension Safety Program Specialist) on farmstead preparedness and care after a storm. It can be found on line at:

<http://texashelp.tamu.edu/005-agriculture/farmstead-preparedness-recovery.php>

A few of their suggestions for protecting cattle from the aftermath of storms include:

1. Gather and dispose of trash, limbs, wire, and damaged equipment that could harm livestock. Clear and repair damaged fences.
2. Make sure livestock have plenty of water and food that have not been contaminated by pollutants. In some cases, it is necessary to truck in water and food, or to remove livestock from contaminated areas.
3. Properly and immediately dispose of dead carcasses. If rendering plants are still available in your area, they may process some dead animals. Those not processed should be buried away from water bodies at least 3 to 4 feet deep and covered with quick-lime to accelerate decomposition.
4. Observe livestock for signs of infectious disease such as pneumonia or foot rot. All animals that die immediately following a disaster should be necropsied by a veterinarian.
5. Spray livestock with insect repellent in case of floods to protect against mosquitoes that may carry disease.

There are other things to consider when clearing the storm debris. Be mindful of such things as fiberglass insulation that is often scattered across pastures. Gather as much of the big pieces as possible so that cattle do not consume large amounts of the insulation. Also plastic bags may be

ingested by cattle and cause compacted intestinal tracts. Avoid junk or debris that could be a source of lead. (This could really be an issue after a severe thunderstorm or tornado with wind damage which results in roofing debris spread across the pasture.) DO NOT allow cattle access to pastures where old car batteries or sources of crank case oil (old abandoned vehicles or machines) may cause lead poisoning.

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