

# ***COW/CALF CORNER***

## ***The Newsletter***

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

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Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Animal Reproduction Specialist

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## **Length of Breeding Season Does Matter**

By Glenn Selk

A research analysis of 394 ranch observations from the Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico SPA (standardized performance analysis) data set provided insight into the age old argument about "leaving the bull out" or having a defined breeding season. OSU and Texas A&M Agricultural Economists (Parker, et al) presented a paper at the 2004 Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists. They found a positive relationship between number of days of the breeding season and the production cost per hundredweight of calf weaned. Also they reported a negative relationship between number of days of the breeding season and pounds of calf weaned per cow per year.

The data suggested that for each day the breeding season was lengthened, the annual cost of producing a hundred pounds of weaned calf increased by 4.7 cents and pounds of calf weaned per cow per year decreased by 0.158 pounds. The range of breeding seasons in the data set was from extremely short (less than one month) to 365 days or continuous presence of the bull. The trend lines that resulted from the analysis of the data give us an opportunity to evaluate the economic importance of a defined breeding season. The producer that leaves the bull out year-round (365 days) would sell **45.82 fewer pounds of calf per cow per year** on the average than producers with a 75 day breeding season. That same producer would have **\$13.63 greater costs per hundredweight of weaned calf** than the producer that used a 75 day breeding season.

## **Castrating Male Calves Early versus Leaving Them as "Cutter Bulls"**

By Glenn Selk

A survey conducted by Oklahoma State University of eastern Oklahoma sale barns in 1997 and 1999 showed that on average, bull calves are \$2.00-3.00/cwt less expensive than steers of similar weight. However, there is little information available to Oklahoma producers on the additional production costs associated with purchasing lightweight bulls vs. steers for use in a stocker operation. Therefore, the objective of several OSU studies was to evaluate differences in performance and health status of steers vs. knife-castrated or band-castrated bulls.

Calves castrated prior to purchase (steers) had significantly improved daily gain (2.35 lb/day vs. 1.77 lb/day) and dry matter intake (8.85 lb/day vs. 7.59 lb/day) compared with calves castrated at processing (bulls). No difference was observed in the feed:gain ratio. The number of times removed from the pen for disease treatment was significantly less for steers vs. bulls suggesting a healthier appearance. In addition, number of treatments and time of recovery tended to be lower in steers vs. bulls. One third (33.3%) of the steers were treated at least once; whereas 59.3% of the "cutter bulls" were treated at least once. None of the steers were treated more than one time; whereas 23.5% of the newly castrated bulls were treated more than once.

Although more experiments comparing the effects of purchasing steers vs. bulls on performance, health, and economics are needed, data suggests that the lower cost associated with purchasing bulls are out-weighed by the additional cost of decreased performance and increased sickness. Medical costs were much higher for bulls compared to animals purchased as steers. Medical costs escalate when cattle require more than one medical treatment. As the cattle markets put more and more emphasis on value-based marketing of feeder calves, cow calf producers can expect to be discounted increasingly for leaving male calves un-castrated.

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