

# ***COW/CALF CORNER***

## ***The Newsletter***

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

**July 13, 2007**

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By Derrell S. Peel, OSU Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

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## **Oklahoma Cow-Calf Economics: Balancing Management and Market Concerns**

By Derrell Peel

Cattle markets, especially feeder markets, are quite strong and should generally remain strong for the balance of 2007 and 2008. If you are inclined to be a worrier, there is a laundry list of factors, any of which could inject volatility in cattle markets. These run the gamut from international trade to consumer beef demand to energy and ethanol impacts. However, only some unexpected huge external factor or an unlikely combination of several of these potential impacts at one time would precipitate a significant sustained impact on feeder cattle markets, especially calf markets. It is never wise to ignore market factors entirely, but the strong supply fundamentals are likely to make feeder markets largely bulletproof for the next 18 to 24 months.

It is always the case that cow-calf producers can do more to change their fate by managing the cost side than the revenue side. At the end of the day, cow-calf producers cannot do much to change overall market levels. With markets in relatively strong shape, it makes sense for cow-calf producers to focus a bit more on management considerations that will impact costs of production this year and next year. This is especially the case in Oklahoma with the extremes in weather that we are having. We have gone from severe drought to widespread flooding and both situations mean that management needs are likely different than normal. In Stillwater, as of July 13, 2007, we have received almost 43 inches of rain in the last 134 days since March 1. Prior to that, you have to go back 602 days, all the way to July 5, 2005 to accumulate an equal rain total.

There are several management areas that producers should be thinking about. One of those is overall herd health and productivity. Many cows emerged from the drought with considerable stress and lower body condition and now the excessively wet conditions may be creating additional problems. Although we are growing lots of forage, pastures are lush, perhaps excessively so, and forage quality is probably not the same as average. Many producers changed fertilization this year, either because it was too dry early and too wet later, or simply because of higher fertilizer costs. This will affect the quantity and quality of grazed forage and any hay that

might be harvested. These lush pastures have the potential for different nutrition impacts as well as possible health concerns. All of which means that producers may want to consider pregnancy testing as early as possible to see if reproductive status is as expected.

The forage issue may become even more important in the fall and winter. It has been nearly impossible to harvest hay and hay supplies this winter, at least in this region, are likely to be short in both quantity and quality. If the wet conditions persist, producers may have little opportunity for hay harvest but may have lots of standing forage. It is not too early to think about whether grazing management needs to be changed to manage utilization of growing forage and also for stockpiling forage for the fall and winter. Producers should consider feed needs this winter, available forage supplies and begin planning now to avoid shortfalls in the winter.

## **Late Summer and Early Fall Supplementation with Protein**

by Glenn Selk

Because condition at calving and breeding are so important, it may at first seem silly to begin worrying about condition in the middle of July. However, it must be remembered that there are few economical ways to increase body condition once winter has arrived. So, good body condition in the winter must depend on the nutritional program the previous summer. If on July 15, the cows are in good condition and are rapidly regaining weight lost the past winter, the program can run normally. If, on the other hand, the past winter was severe and cows are still thin now, with every likelihood that they will be thin going into the next winter, thought needs to be given about the most economical method of improving condition before winter. Weaning dates can be moved up; remember calves would be young and weaning weights will be reduced. A well-planned supplementation program may offer help. When adequate standing forage is available, feeding small amounts of protein supplements during late summer and fall can efficiently increase weight and condition gain of spring calving cows (Table 1). Feeding as little as .6 lb/head/day of soybean meal, (**about 1.5 lb/head, 3 times per week**) during late summer increased cow weight by 25 lb. and improved condition score by .67 units. See the OSU data in table 1 below.

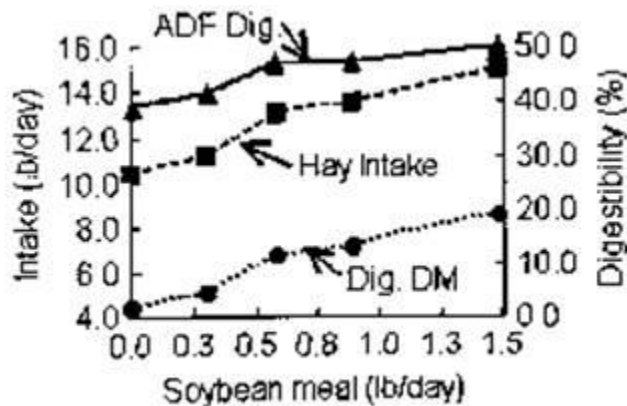
**Table 1. Late Summer and Fall Supplementation to Increase Weight and Condition of Spring Calving Cows (source: OSU Beef Cattle Manual; 3rd Edition)**

Trait measured	No Supplement	0.6 pound/day soybean meal
Aug. 4 to Nov. 9 Weight change (lb)	27	52
Aug. 4 to Nov. 9 Condition change	-0.15	+0.52

A supplement level of 1 to 1.5 lbs/head/day would probably have been more desirable and provided greater weight increases. The important point is that during late summer and early fall, protein supplements can permit efficient increases in weight and condition when forage is available. If one waits until winter to try to increase cow weight, protein alone will likely not be sufficient and larger amounts of energy supplements or hay will be required. If weather

conditions are very cold, it may not be economically feasible to increase condition during the winter.

The following graph shows clearly the associated effects of protein supplementation on low quality forage. In this OSU research, replacement heifers were fed low quality grass hay free choice. Without protein supplements, they were only able to consume 10 pounds of the hay per day. As the heifers were fed soybean meal in increasing amounts, the hay intake increased. Why could this happen? The microbes in the rumen are utilizing the protein to develop, grow, and multiply. The rumen microbes more quickly and more effectively digest the low quality roughage. This in turn allows the heifers to consume more hay on a daily basis. Forage intake increases because the hay is more rapidly digested, and therefore passed through the digestive system more quickly. The amount of energy gained from each pound of roughage increased. This is determined by the % acid detergent fiber (ADF) digestibility. As a result, the total amount of digestible energy available to the heifers (Digestible Dry Matter) was greatly increased from about 4 pounds to 8 pounds per head per day.



The bottom line is: there is a "lot of bang for the buck" for the money spent on the small amount of protein supplement. With adequate quantities of standing forage available in many Oklahoma pastures, this could be an excellent summer to take advantage of positive associated effects of protein supplementation.

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