COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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In this Issue

How To Start A Controlled Calving Season

By Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Cattle Reproduction Specialist

As some producers re-build their cow herd after two years of drought-caused downsizing, this is a great opportunity to become a more efficient, profitable herd. If the cow herd has been routinely running with the bull on a year-round basis, use this opportunity to tighten up the breeding and calving seasons. No system of converting from a year-long breeding season to a controlled breeding program can completely eliminate the delaying of some cows from their current calving schedule.

A system for converting from year round to a 90-day controlled calving season over a period of three years would present less loss and fewer problems than to try to convert in one year. The following steps are suggestions for getting a controlled breeding system:

1. Build a good, strong bull pen or well fenced bull pasture. An electric fence in addition to regular fence may be needed.

2. Remove bull from herd. Select removal date to coincide with latest date you want calves born. For example, pull the bulls on January 15 for a fall-calving herd that eventually will have calves from September 1st and through mid October.

3. Sixty days after removing the bulls from the herd (or at a convenient time near this date), pregnancy check all cows and cull all non-pregnant dry breeding-age females which have been running with the bull and all non-pregnant cows with calves five months of age or older.

4. Put bulls back with the herd the first year so that calving season will be six months long.

5. Put breeding-age replacement heifers with the bull about 20 days ahead of the final long-range planned breeding date for your herd.

6. The second year, follow the same system as outlined above except start the breeding season so that the calving season will be about 4-1/2 months long.

7. The third year follow the same system as outlined above, except start the breeding season so that the calving season will be 75 to 90 days. Also, cull all open cows this year when pregnancy checking regardless of age of their calves. The breeding season may be reduced even further in the following years.

Maintaining a controlled breeding and calving season can be one of the most important management tools for cow calf producers. A uniform, heavier, and more valuable calf crop is one key reason for keeping the breeding season short. Plus, more efficient cow supplementation and cowherd health programs are a product of a short breeding season.

Good Wheat Pasture Grazing Potential, But Crop Production Concerns Dominate

By Derrell S. Peel, OSU Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

In general, it appears that the potential for winter wheat grazing in Oklahoma is pretty good. Subsoil moisture is plentiful after the unprecedented spring and early summer rains (plus an unprecedented tropical storm in the central part of the state last weekend) and more rain this weekend will provide surface moisture. However, the disastrous harvest and unusual weather this year left many producers with fields in horrible shape and producers are scrambling to get field work done to be ready to plant this fall. Recently flooded areas will see additional delays in getting back into the fields. Additionally, seed wheat is in very short supply and of variable quality. With strong markets for wheat and good potential for grazing, producers seem to be focused (logically so!) on dealing with the myriad of production challenges that have accompanied this incredible and bizarre year.

In addition to wheat fieldwork, both sorghum and corn acreage are up in Oklahoma and many producers have more summer crop harvest issues to contend with as well. Dryland corn harvest in Oklahoma is just beginning, with prospects for yields well above Oklahoma averages. The result of all of this is that producers do not appear to be particularly aggressive about stocker cattle prospects yet. After having the 2007 wheat crop jerked out from under their feet, most producers are focused on getting summer crops harvested and a winter wheat crop established before they think about stocker cattle and grazing. The next month will be critical, but assuming we get decent wheat pasture established this fall, I expect there will be considerable interest in stocker grazing but also some continued caution. Producers will likely be pretty conservative with grazing programs to minimize any potential negative impact on wheat yields.

Much of the same attitude may apply to cow-calf producers as well with respect to hay and forage production. My sense is that although considerable hay has been produced recently, producers are rightfully cautious about total hay supplies and overall cow-calf production conditions. I do think the second half of the year will show some cow herd expansion in Oklahoma, but the pace is modest and perhaps localized in specific regions. Depending on what the winter brings there could be significantly more interest in herd expansion next spring. For now, both crop and livestock producers would just like to get production back to something like business as usual.