

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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January Cattle on Feed: Good News or Bad News?

Dr. Derrell S. Peel, OSU Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

The USDA January Cattle on Feed shows that 2008 is beginning with a rather large feedlot inventory, in fact, the January 1 on-feed total of 12.1 million head is the largest January value since the series began in 1996. The total inventory is one percent larger than one year ago. This sounds rather bearish but is not necessarily the whole story.

Feedlot placements in December were slightly less than pre-report estimates but still a rather large number. Seasonally large imports of Canadian feeder cattle and placements of lightweight feeders because of poor winter forage conditions contributed to the strong placement figure. Marketings were slightly better than expected and were up one percent from last year's small value.

Timing can change the picture in the feedlot situation and it is important to remember that the large placements since last September included not only the anticipated summer yearlings but an unusually large number of Canadian feeders as well as lightweight feeders that would have been grazing this winter, if there was any grazing to be had. Early placement of winter calves means they will not be available for placement in the first half of 2008.

Certainly, conditions in Oklahoma suggest that there will be a much smaller than usual March wheat pasture run and May grazeout run. Many of those calves are either already in the feedlot or are being carried through the winter for grazing next summer. Likewise, the run of Canadian feeder cattle last fall, driven by terrible Canadian feeding returns and fears of COOL impacts in 2008, will diminish in the coming months. Feedlot placements should pull back in the first

quarter of 2008 and feedlot inventories will decrease somewhat. Feeder cattle numbers will be relatively tight in the first half of 2008 and feeder markets should stabilize and probably strengthen through the first quarter, albeit with a nervous eye on the rollercoaster corn market.

What is Bovine Trichomoniasis?

Gene Parker Jr. DVM, OSU Extension Area Food Animal Quality and Health Specialist

Recently the Nebraska Department of Agriculture has issued new requirements for the entry of Oklahoma breeding cattle into Nebraska. These requirements are meant to stop the entry of cattle infected with the organism *Trichomonas*. Because this disease has been relatively rare in Oklahoma, many producers in this state are unacquainted with it. The Oklahoma Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory has reported that several Oklahoma herds have been diagnosed with “Trich” in 2007.

Bovine trichomoniasis (commonly called “Trich”) can be an important cause of economic loss in cattle operations that use natural service. This disease is caused by a protozoan organism called *Trichomonas foetus*. This organism lives in the internal sheath and prepuce of the bull. In cows this organism colonizes in the internal reproductive tract.

How does it get transmitted? Trichomoniasis is a venereal disease of cattle. It is transmitted from cow to cow by a bull during breeding. Bulls show no clinical signs. Cows can commonly clear the infection within a few months; however, infection in bulls over 4 years of age is usually permanent and is the main source of transmission from one breeding season to another. The disease is self-limiting in cows, as opposed to bulls, that will be permanently infected. After several heat cycles, most cows and heifers clear the infection, but this may take months.

How does it affect cattle? What will you usually see if you have a problem? The most common signs in an infected herd are related to infertility. The cows will breed and settle, but then they experience early embryonic death of the fertilized embryo. About 30 to 40 days later the cow will once again come back into heat and breed. This may go on for 2 to 4 cycles until the cow clears the infection and settles for good, staying pregnant to deliver a full term live calf. While this whole process is happening the cows may have a calving date that is 3 to 6 months late.

Ranchers may notice the following signs when “Trich” infects a herd:

- Early abortion (too early to find an aborted fetus) and return to heat
- Repeated breeding resulting in long breeding seasons.
- A wide range of gestational ages at pregnancy check.
- In first-time infected herds, it is common to end with a 50 to 70 percent calf crop strung out over three to eight months.

How can you test your herd for infection? Visit with your local large animal veterinarian. Testing for *Trichomonas foetus* is usually done on breeding bulls by performing a preputial

wash and inoculating the sample into special culture media. If one bull is found positive, you should assume that the whole herd is exposed.

Studies of positive bulls have shown that this culture method will miss about 10 to 20 percent of infected bulls if the test is performed only once. So, if no infected bull is found on the basis of one culture of all the bulls in the herd, then we can be 80 to 90 percent sure that the herd is "clean."

How can you treat infected herds? Again, it is important that producers visit with their veterinarian. There are vaccines available. The vaccines help cows/heifers to clear the infection in a matter of weeks (versus months in unvaccinated cows). In most cases, it does not prevent infection. The vaccine does not prevent infection or reduce the disease in bulls. There is no approved treatment for infected bulls.

How can you prevent the disease in your herd?

- Use young, fertile bulls or artificial insemination (AI).
- Culture new bulls at breeding soundness exam time.
- Keep a closed herd and test any animal that you buy.

How can you control the disease in our herd? If one of your bulls is positive for trichomoniasis, it is recommended to cull all bulls and vaccinate all females twice, one month apart. If you want to keep your bulls, you can vaccinate all females annually, but it would be better to cull all bulls and open cows before next season.

An alternative, if you don't want to cull all bulls, is to sample them at least three times at weekly intervals. With three negative tests, we will be 99 percent confident that a bull is negative.

Helping the Newborn Calf Breathe

Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Animal Reproduction Specialist

Despite our best efforts at bull selection and heifer development, cows or heifers occasionally need assistance at calving time. It is imperative that the newborn calf begin to breathe as soon as possible. To stimulate the initiation of the respiratory process, a few ideas may help. First, manually clear the mouth and nasal passages of fluids and mucus. Hanging the calf over a fence is not the best method to accomplish this task. The weight of the calf on the fence restricts the movement of the diaphragm muscles. The fence impairs the diaphragm's ability to contract and move. This diaphragm activity is necessary to expand the lungs to draw in air and needed oxygen.

A better method is to briskly tickle the inside of the nostrils of the calf with a straw. This will usually cause the calf to have a reflex action such as a "snort" or cough. The reflex cough or "snort" expands the lungs and allows air to enter. Expect the calf to pant rapidly for a few

minutes after breathing is initiated. Panting is the natural response that increases oxygen intake and carbon dioxide release and will allow the calf to reach normal blood gas concentrations.

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