

COW/CALF CORNER

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Small Wheat Pasture Run Almost Over

Derrell S. Peel, OSU Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

Feeder cattle marketings in Oklahoma have increased seasonally the last three weeks but total sales are less than last year. The eight-market feeder auction total since mid-February is down nearly 14 percent from the same period in 2007 and it appears that most of the cattle on dual purpose wheat have been marketed. Dr Jeff Edwards, OSU Wheat Specialist reports that most of the wheat in the state is near the first hollow stem stage this week. Cool weather delayed development somewhat but he expects the majority of wheat varieties to be at first hollow stem by next week. Any remaining cattle should be removed immediately to avoid damage to a very valuable wheat grain crop.

The grain versus gain tradeoff this year clearly indicates that grazing a week past first hollow stem is costly. For example, an 875 pound steer gaining 2 pounds per day would add 14 pounds in a week. With a value of gain of roughly \$0.75/lb., this adds \$10.50 to the value of the animal. At a stocking rate of 0.6 acres per steer, the value per acre of another week of grazing is \$6.30, less than one bushel of wheat at today's wheat prices. However, grazing one week past first hollow stem would likely reduce wheat yields 10 to 30 percent. A 20 percent loss on 40 bushel wheat yield potential is an eight bushel reduction in yield. That represents a loss of more than \$80 per acre at current wheat prices and even with somewhat lower wheat prices at harvest would likely mean a revenue loss of \$50-70/acre.

Given this value of wheat, not much wheat will be grazed out and there will likely be relatively few heavy feeders marketed during the April-June period. There are some light weight stockers on mixed cool-season pasture or other winter programs that will go on to summer grazing and producers are beginning to buy stockers for summer grazing. Some of these cattle will be marketed by July as early-intensive stockers in areas such as the Osage/Flint Hills region, but the majority will likely be marketed in September and October after season-long grazing. Despite the ominous shadow of grain prices, there is potential for some additional strength in feeder

prices in the next 30-45 days as tight supplies of heavy feeder cattle and grazing demand for light weight stockers will support feeder prices across the board.

Care of the Newly Purchased Young Bulls

Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Animal Reproduction Specialist

March is a time of many production and test station bull sales. Good young bulls represent an important investment in any commercial beef herd. Proper care of the young bull will help maximize the genetic improvement that he brings to your ranch. Any rancher that purchases a young, well-conditioned bull should plan to gradually reduce the fleshiness of the bull before the breeding season. To let these bulls down, it is a good practice to start them on a ration that is similar to the one to which they have been accustomed, but that is 60 to 70 percent of their previous intake. The amount of grain can be reduced at the rate of about 10 percent per week until the desired level is achieved. At the same time, substitutions should be made in the form of light, bulky feeds--such as high quality grass hay or alfalfa hay. Ideally, this letdown should be completed prior to the time a bull is turned out. Dramatic nutritional changes can have an adverse effect on semen production, so it is important that these ration modifications be done gradually. Allow the change to take place over several weeks instead of allowing a rapid condition and weight loss which could be reflected in a reduced calf crop next year. If a young bull is coming off of a high energy diet (i.e. gain test), an example feeding schedule at his new home would be as follows:

Week	Type	% of Body wt.	lb./day for 1000 lb. bull	lb./day for 1500 lb. bull
1st	bull test	1.5	15	23
	hay	1.0	10	15
2nd	bull test	1.0	10	15
	hay	1.5	15	23
3rd	bull test	1.0	10	15
	hay	1.5	15	23
4th	bull test	0.75	7.5	11
	hay	1.75	17.5	27

Check with the bull seller to learn about the bull's current diet. In some instances, the bull ration may already be well over 50% forage and the daily grain amount at the new home can be started at 1% or less (daily feed) of the bull's body weight

One important note to consider! The protein content of the total diet needs to be at, or above 12% crude protein. Therefore, if the hay quality is low, and the bull test ration contains only 13 – 14% protein, then the bull may become protein deficient as the forage makes up a larger portion of the diet. Here are two suggested methods to offset this potential problem: 1) Top-dress the bull test feed with a protein (for example: soybean meal) pellet. One pound per head per day should offset most potential protein deficiencies; 2) Substitute 20% range cubes for the bull test concentrate. Start with 6 to 8 pounds of range cubes per day, then gradually reduce the

intake of 20% cubes, while allowing free choice access to hay and/or pasture. Range cubes are readily available at many feed stores and commercial producers are already accustomed to handling them as a feedstuff. This will be a more dramatic decline in nutritional status for highly fed bulls, but will be much less stressful than immediately forcing the young bull to a diet of 100% low to average quality forage. If the bull has not been eating 6 to 8 pounds or more of grain or supplement each day, any high energy grain or range cube addition to his diet should be done gradually to avoid digestive disorders such as founder or acidosis.

Continue feeding the grain mix or cubes to the young bull during the breeding season if at all possible. This will be difficult in many range situations, but when possible, helps prevent severe weight and condition loss by the young bull.

The yearling bulls need to be taken from the breeding pasture after 60 days and fed to return to proper body condition.

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