

COW/CALF CORNER

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Fall Born Calves Have Lighter Birth Weights

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The beginning of August reminds us that the fall calving season is not far away. Most fall calving cows are in excellent body condition because of the availability and quality of standing forage in the pastures. Some producers may be misled into believing that the fall-calving cow, in a body condition score of 6 or better, will have a larger birth weight calf because of the excellent nutrition during pregnancy. However, research data does not confirm this belief.

Oklahoma State University researchers used five years of data from the North Lake Carl Blackwell range to answer the question of birth weight differences due to seasons. Records of 414 live births (242 spring and 172 fall) from cows of five crossbred cow groups were analyzed for differences in birth weight. The cows ranged in age from 4 to 7 years old. All cows were bred artificially to the same Salers and Limousin bulls. Fall calving cows delivered smaller birth weight calves (77.7 pounds) than did spring calving cows (82.2 pounds).

The reason that fall calving cows have lighter birth weights is generally attributed to the fact that the cows are gestating in hot weather. Blood flow patterns of cattle during periods of high temperatures change in an effort to dissipate heat from the body. Blood (and the nutrients that it carries) is shunted to the outer extremities during hot weather to dissipate heat. Therefore less blood flow is sent to the inner core of the cow where the fetus is gestating. This subtle change in blood flow is commonly thought to be the reason that lighter birth weights occur to cattle that are in the last trimester of pregnancy in June, July, and August. The small amount of difference noted in Oklahoma cattle did not cause a loss of viability of calves born in September and October. Source: Selk and Buchanan, 1990 OSU Animal Science Research Report.

Wheat Producers Should Evaluate Winter Grazing Potential

Derrell S. Peel, OSU Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

At the current time, we have triple digit temperatures in Oklahoma and winter wheat production seems a long ways away. However, it is not too early for winter wheat producers to begin evaluating wheat

production alternatives. The sticker shock of high input prices has many producers understandably skittish about production costs. However, it is critical that producers reevaluate all budget components for production alternatives in order to determine optimal production levels and input usage.

In the Southern Plains, where dual-purpose winter wheat is an alternative to grain-only wheat production, producers must make adjustments in wheat production practices for grazing, namely additional fertilizer and higher seeding rates. Additionally, the early planting dates needed for winter forage production often imply some reduction in expected wheat grain yield. These factors must be evaluated against the value of grazing. It is important for wheat producers to realize that not only are wheat prices as well as input costs higher, but the value of wheat forage for grazing is also significantly higher this year.

High feedlot cost of gain means that the value of forage-based stocker gain is also higher. In fact, feedlot cost of gain is the mirror image of the stocker value of gain since the same market signals that encourage feedlots to use less grain for cattle production simultaneously provide incentives for more forage-based stocker production. Current feeder cattle prices provide an example. The week of July 28, the OKC price for 574 pound, No. 1 steers was \$116.21/cwt. and the price for 880 pound, No. 1 steers was \$109.08. This suggests a gross margin of \$292.85/head for 306 pounds of gain or a value per pound of gain of \$0.96. At typical wheat pasture stocking rates, this implies a total value of grazing in excess of \$175/acre. This value would logically be shared between the animal owner and the wheat owner. The seasonality of prices between the time of purchase and sale can modify this example somewhat but the general tendency for high stocker value of gain is expected to persist for the foreseeable future.

There many unknown and individual considerations that will determine whether wheat grazing makes sense for individual wheat producers. At this point we don't know whether we will have conditions favorable for wheat pasture development this fall. We don't know what the purchase price for stocker cattle will be this fall, let alone the market for heavy feeders next spring. However, preliminary budgets indicate that winter wheat stocker grazing margins are attractive and that current Feeder futures offer opportunities to lock in margins.

Over the next 60 days, producers should monitor the possibilities for wheat pasture production and the feasibility of wheat pasture grazing. High input costs and market volatility are not for the faint of heart but there is opportunity in changing markets. It is essential that producers (and their lenders) thoroughly evaluate possibilities starting with a blank sheet of paper. Old rules of thumb are very dangerous in today's markets.

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