

# **COW/CALF CORNER**

The Newsletter

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## **Cattle Markets Influenced by Inventory and Timing**

Derrell S. Peel, OSU Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

The most recent USDA Cattle on Feed report confirms that overall feedlot inventories remain below last year's levels. The August 1 feedlot inventory of 9.689 million head is the lowest monthly feedlot total since August, 2004. The July marketings number was well anticipated in pre-report estimates at 102 percent of one year ago. However, the July placements number of 102 percent of a year earlier was below most analysts' estimates and below the average estimate of 106 percent of last year. This likely is partly due to continued shifts in seasonal cattle production patterns. The high cost of feedlot finishing and the resulting forage production incentives appear to be keeping more cattle in the country through the summer.

It is one more sign that the industry is returning once again to a more yearling based production system and more dominated by the annual forage cycle. This might suggest a relatively large run of yearling feeders in the fall but there is also increased incentive for retained ownership of calves and likely smaller runs of calves in the traditional fall weaning period. In general it appears that the beef industry is adding 3 to 5 months of age to most cattle in order to utilize more forage in beef production.

On August 19, USDA also issued the United States and Canadian Cattle report. The report pegs the all cattle and calves total for July 1 at 119.495 million head, down one percent from last year. This value is also the lowest July 1 total for the two countries in the last decade. The BSE-induced build of cattle inventories in Canada is just about liquidated and the more recent trend of larger imports of Canadian cattle to the U.S., resulting from exchange rate impacts and poor competitiveness of Canadian cattle feeding and packing, should also moderate as market flows of animals catch up with inventories. U.S. imports of Mexican cattle are down 35 percent this year from last year's reduced levels as a result of limited inventories and strong beef demand in Mexico. All in all it appears that the fundamental cattle supply situation in North America will remain tight and supportive of prices for the next couple of years at least and likely longer.

# Forage Testing -- A Key Decision Aide in 2008

Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Cattle Reproduction Specialist

Oklahoma producers find themselves out of their "comfort zone" as they go into the winter of 2008. Many have adequate forage supplies. However quality of the hay may be different than in the past. Because of low, or no fertilizer applications, and because custom hay crews were over-booked and later than usual, the grass hay quality likely is not as good as in previous years. In some spotty areas, the hay may have been soaked with a heavy rain while still on the field or in the windrow.

Forage analysis can be a useful tool to remove some of the mystery concerning the hay that producers will feed this winter. The high cost of protein and energy supplements are further fuel to this advice. Testing the grass hays this year for protein and energy content will help the producer design winter supplementation programs most appropriate for the forage supply that is available. It is hard to think of any year when forage testing was more important.

There are several good methods of sampling hay for forage analysis. Most nutritionists would prefer to use a mechanical coring probe made specifically for this purpose. The coring probe is usually a stainless steel tube with a serrated, cutting edge. It is 1 inch in diameter and is designed to fit on a 1/2 inch drill or brace. Cordless drills make these tools quite mobile so that the hay bales to be tested do not have to be hauled to be near an electrical outlet. The hay samples are placed in paper or plastic bags for transfer to a forage testing laboratory. Cores are taken from several bales at random to obtain a representative sample to be analyzed.

Grab samples can also be obtained and tested. To receive the best information, grab several samples by hand from about 6 inches into the open side of the bale or the middle third of a small round bale. Place all of the sample in the bag. Do not discard weeds or stems, just because they look undesirable. They are still part of the hay that you are offering to the livestock. Be certain to label the forage samples accurately and immediately, in order for the laboratory analysis to be correctly assigned to the proper hay piles or bales. Obviously the more samples that are sent to the laboratory for analysis, the more information can be gained. Just as obvious is the fact that as the number of samples increase, the cost of forage testing increases. Any of the potential nitrate accumulating hays should be tested for nitrate concentration.

Samples can be taken to the [OSU County Extension office](#) near you and then sent to the [OSU Soil, Water, and Forage Testing laboratory](#) in Agricultural Hall on the campus at Stillwater. The price list below gives some of the options from which producers may choose to best fit their situation. There are other commercial laboratories available that also do an excellent job of forage analysis.

## [Forage Analysis Price list from OSU Soil, Water, and Forage Testing Laboratory](#)

Basic Analysis	Protein and Moisture	\$6.00
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Basic Plus Energy	Protein and Moisture, ADF, TDN, Net Energy for: Gain, Lactation, Maintenance	\$12.00
Basic Plus Energy Plus Relative Feed Value (RFV)	Protein, Moisture, ADF, TDN and Energy NDF - Neutral Detergent Fiber RFV - Relative Feed Value (Alfalfa Only)	\$18.00
Nitrate Content	Nitrate and Moisture	\$6.00

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