

Cow Calf Corner Newsletter for August 29, 2008

COW/CALF CORNER The Newsletter From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

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Evaluating Dried Distillers Grains as a Range Cow Supplement Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Cattle Reproduction Specialist

The high cost of cattle feeds have many cow calf producers out “window shopping” for the best buys in cow supplements for this winter. Feedlot and backgrounders have experience with the biofuel by-products such as dried distillers grains. Many cow calf producers are still uncertain about their use as supplements for cows on dormant winter grass. Therefore OSU nutritionists have studied the use of dried distillers grains (with solubles) as supplements for low quality forages for gestating cows. They compared (among other treatments) the feeding of a supplement made with cottonseed meal and wheat midds with a supplement made of dried distillers grains with solubles (DDGS). The cottonseed/midds supplement was formulated to have the same protein content as the DDGS. Both supplements contained 31.5% crude protein. The DDGS had more fat and therefore had a higher energy value of 81% TDN compared to 69% TDN for the cottonseed/midds supplement.

Both feeds were fed at the calculated rate of 3.41 pounds per head per day during gestation. They were delivered to the cattle 3 times per week at 8 pounds per feeding starting in early December and continued to calving. After calving all cows received the same supplement but 4 times per week. All the cows had free choice access to the same prairie hay (5.1% crude protein). Weight change and body condition change during the winter before calving was negligible and very similar between the two supplement groups. The cottonseed/midds group lost 14 pounds from December to pre-calving, whereas the DDGS cows lost 7 pounds. Body condition score loss was .2 and .07 BCS, respectively. Apparently dried distiller grains with solubles can be fed as a cow supplement similar to conventional supplements that have comparable concentrations of protein. The best price per pound of protein and TDN should determine which supplement to buy. Source: Winterholler and co-workers. 2008 Oklahoma Cattleman’s Association Young Cattleman’s Conference.

Growing Bred Replacement Heifers

Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Cattle Reproduction Specialist

Bred replacement heifers that will calve in January and February need to continue to grow and maintain body condition. Ideally, two year old heifers should be in a body condition score 6 at the time that their first calf is born. This allows them the best opportunity to provide adequate colostrum to the baby, repair the reproductive tract, return to heat cycles, rebreed on time for next year, and continue normal body growth. From now until calving time, the heifers will need to be gaining 1 to 1 1/2 pounds per head per day, assuming that they are in good body condition coming out of summer.

Heifers will need supplemental protein, if the major source of forage in the diet is bermudagrass or native pasture or grass hay. If the forage source is adequate in quantity and average in quality (6 - 9% crude protein), heifers will need about 2 pounds of a high protein (38 - 44% CP) supplement each day. This will probably need to be increased with higher quality hay (such as alfalfa) or additional energy feed (20% range cubes) as winter weather adds additional nutrient requirements. Soybean hulls or wheat midds may also be used to insure adequate energy intake of pregnant heifers.

Wheat pasture (if adequate rainfall produces growth) can be used as a supplement for pregnant replacement heifers. Using wheat pasture judiciously makes sense for pregnant heifers for two reasons. Pregnant heifers consuming full feed of wheat pasture will gain at about 3 pounds per head per day. If they are on the wheat too long the heifers can become very fat and may cause dystocia (calving difficulty). Also the wheat pasture can be used for gain of stocker cattle or weaned replacement heifers more efficiently. If wheat pasture is used for bred heifers, use it as a protein supplement by allowing the heifers access to the wheat pasture on at least alternate days. Some producers report that 1 day on wheat pasture and two days on native or bermuda will work better. This encourages the heifers to go rustle in the warm season pasture for the second day, rather than just stand by the gate waiting to be turned back in to the wheat. What ever method is used to grow the pregnant replacement heifers, plan to have them in good body condition by calving so that they will grow into fully-developed productive cows.

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