

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Optimum Weaning Dates for Fall Calving Cows

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Oklahoma State University animal scientists evaluated weaning dates of 158 Angus fall-calving cows over a 4 year period. Cows were allowed to nurse their calves for about 210 days (April Weaning) or 300 days (July Weaning). All cows calved in September or October and were weaned in mid-April (April Wean) or mid-July (July Wean). April weaned young cows had greater re-breeding percentages (98.4% versus 89.3%) than July weaned young cows. However, there was no advantage in the re-breeding performance of April-weaned mature cows compared to July-weaned mature cows (90.2% versus 96.7%). April-weaned cows were heavier and fleshier at calving than July weaned cows.

Calves weaned in July were 90 days older and 204 pounds heavier (642 lb versus 438 lb) when weaned than were the April-weaned calves. The April-weaned calves were allowed to graze native pasture after weaning and weighed 607 pounds in mid July. It appears more advantageous to delay weaning of calves born to cows 4 years or older to July while maintaining April weaning for cows 3 years of age or younger. Source: Hudson and co-workers. Journal of Anim. Sci. 2010 vol. 88:1577.

Beef Supply and Demand on the Same Page?

Derrell S. Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

The recent run in cattle and beef markets is exciting and a pleasant surprise to many. Six weeks ago, I don't think anyone anticipated that markets would strengthen this much or this fast. Since late 2008, we have recognized that weak demand, both domestic and international, was the principal limiting factor in cattle and beef markets. Throughout this period we have recognized

that the supply fundamentals were supportive if not very evident. Cattle numbers in the U.S. and on the North American continent have continued to shrink and feeder supplies are tight and will remain tight for the next several years. It is easy to overlook the positive influence of supplies when poor demand is driving the market.

However, a couple of things have changed this spring. First, winter weather has further tightened beef supplies with lighter carcass weights. More importantly, it is clear that demand is not dragging down the market like it was this time last year. It appears that demand is improving, although it takes time for that to be confirmed with data. Admittedly, we can't say for sure how much or how quickly demand is improving but the recent market run leaves little doubt that demand, if it is not improving, is at least not pulling markets down compared to a year ago. With demand neutral, if not increasing, the positive impacts of supplies are quickly evident in stronger markets.

When supply and demand are on the same page, things can turn around quickly and that is exactly what we are seeing. Going forward there are still some questions. Just how much and how fast is domestic beef demand recovering? We have to wait and see. Will international trade continue to recover and provide support as it has in recent months? Although demand is uncertain, the supply fundamentals reduce the downside risk from this point on. We are in a dynamic market with changing price levels and price relationships and margins will continue to be volatile for all industry sectors. Risk management will be important but it is easier when more of the uncertainty is to the upside.

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