

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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There is no doubt that the latest USDA Cattle on Feed report will cause a market reaction. After four months of lower placements, year over year, the trade was expecting a large increase in feedlot placements in March. The recent run up in feeder cattle prices suggests that demand for feeder cattle has been strong and a couple of months of limited feedlot profitability (after many months of losses) provided the motive. However, there was a wide variation in regional placement patterns and the resulting average was not only lower than expected but lower than the lowest pre-report estimate. The industry was keyed in on large placements in Colorado, Kansas and Nebraska which were heavily offset by reduced placements in Texas and Oklahoma. The resulting level of 103 percent of 2009 March placements does not even cover the fact that there was an additional business day in March. In short, there was no increase in March placements this year.

Marketings were close to pre-report estimates at 104 percent of last year, again only holding steady when adjusted for the additional March slaughter day this year. The April 1 on-feed total 10.769 million head, down four percent from one year ago. This is the lowest April 1 on-feed total since 2004.

Feedlot placements have relatively little to do with current fed cattle markets (which are strong for other reasons) but lots to do with fed cattle markets in the future. Not only was the level of placements lower than expected but most of the increase was in light weight feeders that will finish in September and October. This should moderate some of the concerns about summer market pressure. Obviously we are still assessing beef demand recovery but it appears that

supply fundamentals have a lot of momentum going forward. Having said that, there will likely be some relative increase in placements April and May with cattle coming off of grazeout wheat. If it has any impacts it will be in short term timing of marketings in the fourth quarter but it does not change the fact that total feeder supplies are and will remain very tight.

Realistic Expectations for Estrous Synchronization and AI Programs

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Extension Cattle Reproduction Specialist

Producers that are wanting to improve the genetic makeup of their beef herds very often turn to artificial insemination (AI) as a tool to accomplish that goal. Many times, these producers have very high expectations as they begin the first season of artificial breeding. Perhaps they have heard other producers tell of situations where “near-perfect” pregnancy rates resulted from THEIR artificial insemination program. Everyone wants to get every cow or heifer bred as they start the labor and expense of an AI program. However, the rules of biology do not often allow for 100% pregnancy rates in most situations.

First of all it is important to understand several terms.

Estrous response rate: the percentage of cows found to be cycling in response to an estrus synchronization protocol. In other words, if we put 100 cows through the working chute and give them estrous synchronization drugs, and only 80 of those cows responded to the estrous synchronization products, then we have an “estrous response rate” of 80 percent. Perhaps some of the cows were not “ready” because they were later calving or they were in poorer body condition. If we are breeding only after they are detected in heat, then only 80 of the original 100 cows would be bred to AI. The long wet winter of 2009-2010 may have an impact on the body condition of cows going in to the estrous synchronization protocols and adversely impact the percentage of cows responding to the synchronization products.

Conception rate: the percentage of the cows that were actually inseminated that were palpated and found to be pregnant 60 or more days later. In other words, of the 80 cows in the above example, that were found in heat and inseminated, IF we later found that 70 percent of those “settled” or became pregnant, we would have found 56 cows pregnant.

Pregnancy rate: the percentage of cows that were initially started on the estrous synchronization protocol that actually became pregnant. In the above example, 56 of the original 100 cows became pregnant to the AI program resulting in a pregnancy rate of 56%.

Therefore, the **Estrous response rate X Conception rate = Pregnancy rate.**

In this example: **80% Estrous response X 70% Conception = 56% Pregnant**. The above example is hypothetical, yet very much close to the expected outcome of a successful synchronization and AI program. If heat detection is incorporated as part of the system, then it becomes another very important part of the equation.

Below is a brief summary of just a few of the many trials conducted to study synchronization methods. As you look at this table, observe that similar results occur within the same study (or ranch). There is more difference expressed between operations than between the synchronization methods chosen. *Note that most pregnancy rates vary between 35 and 60%.*

Pregnancy rates (%) in five different beef and dairy studies using three different methods of synchronization

Study	2000 Kansas Study	1999 Minnesota Study	1999 Colorado Study	1999 Kansas Study	1995 Florida Study
Number of cattle	240	471	124	588	346
Method A		37%	58%	56%	
Method B	58%	35%	47%	46%	50%
Method C	58%			52%	

These research trials were conducted under typical farm or ranch conditions with experienced insemination technicians. They give producers a realistic look at what to expect from synchronization and AI programs. Of course some operations will have better results and some will have more disappointing outcomes. We hope everyone has 100 percent pregnancy rates this year and every year, **BUT, lets also be realistic.**

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