

# **COW/CALF CORNER**

## **The Newsletter**

**From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service**

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

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## **Cattle Market Optimism but with Reality Checks**

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

Against a backdrop of very supportive supply fundamentals, there is much reason to be very optimistic about cattle prices in general and for the foreseeable future. At the same time, there are several market factors that remind us that there are limits to just how strong prices can realistically be.

Not surprisingly, boxed beef prices have dropped back a bit from pre-Labor Day highs and, in fact, dropped below \$160/cwt. for Choice last week. Nevertheless, wholesale beef values are still roughly \$10/cwt. higher than the August lows. Fed cattle prices, which briefly spiked to \$100/cwt, have dropped back into the upper \$90s. At current levels, boxed beef and fed cattle prices are compatible and, while boxed beef is looking for some footing, fed cattle prices seem solidly grounded to maintain current levels for the rest of the year.

Feeder cattle prices are relatively strong and are likely to remain so through the fall. Stocker prospects, in terms of both economics and production potential, look pretty good and will likely maintain demand for lightweight stocker cattle this fall. Feedlot demand, especially for long yearlings is expected to more than match available supplies but the extent of feedlot demand for

middle-weight feeders will depend on evolving corn prices this fall. Seasonal weakness in feeder prices is likely to be muted this year compared to typical fall price decreases.

The reality checks have already been alluded to above. While export beef demand remains very supportive, domestic demand, particularly for middle meats is rather sluggish. If boxed beef can stabilize near current levels, the situation described above is sustainable for the remainder of the year. Additional weakness in boxed beef prices will begin to pressure fed cattle prices as well. Domestic beef demand will continue to limit boxed beef and fed cattle prices until additional economic recovery results in stronger domestic beef demand.

The other unknown is the corn market. Current estimates for corn production are for the 2010 crop to match last year's record crop of 13.1 billion bushels. Yield estimates have decreased recently and could drop a bit more. Use estimates have risen for exports and industrial use at the expense of feed use. Current corn supplies can best be described as barely adequate and corn prices will likely remain above \$4.00/bushel and could spike quickly if ending stock levels drop from current minimal levels. Additional strength in corn prices will ration corn use, especially for the cattle sector, and will limit feedlot demand for lighter weights of feeder cattle.

## **Helping Fall-calving Cows and Heifers During the Calving Process**

Dr. Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Professor-Emeritus

Fall calving season is upon the Oklahoma ranches that have fall and winter calving. An issue facing the rancher at calving time, is the amount of time heifers or cows are allowed to be in labor before assistance is given. Traditional text books, fact sheets and magazine articles stated that "Stage II" of labor lasted from 2 to 4 hours. "Stage II" is defined as that portion of the birthing process from the first appearance of the water bag until the baby calf is delivered. Research data from Oklahoma State University and the USDA experiment station at Miles City, Montana clearly show that Stage II is much shorter, lasting approximately 60 minutes in first calf heifers, and 30 minutes in mature cows.

Table 1. Research Results of Length of Stage II of Parturition

Location of Study	No. of Animals	Length of Stage II
USDA (Montana) *	24 mature cows	22.5 min.
USDA (Montana) *	32 first calf heifers	54.1 min
Oklahoma State Univ. **	32 first calf heifers	55.0 min

\*Doornbos, et al. 1984. Journ. of Anim. Science: 59:1

\*\*Putnam, et al. 1985. Therio: 24:385

In these studies, heifers that were in stage II of labor much more than one hour or cows that were in stage II much more than 30 minutes definitely needed assistance. Research information also shows that calves from prolonged deliveries are weaker and more disease prone, even if born alive. In addition, cows or heifers with prolonged deliveries return to heat later and are less likely to be bred for the next calf crop. Consequently a good rule of thumb: If the heifer is NOT making significant progress 1 hour after the water bag or feet appear, examine the heifer to see if you can provide assistance. Mature cows should be watched for only 30 minutes before a rectal examine is conducted. If you cannot safely deliver the calf yourself at this time, call your local veterinarian immediately. Before applying chains and beginning to pull, make CERTAIN that the cervix is fully dilated. To learn more about how to assist cows or heifers at calving, check out two video dvd's available from the [OSU Ag Communication Services](http://www.dasnr.okstate.edu/ag-media/division-videos). (<http://www.dasnr.okstate.edu/ag-media/division-videos>). These two videos are called VT-323 Calving Management-Parturition and VT-324 Calving Management-Dystocia. In the second video (VT-324), Dr. Larry Rice, Professor-Emeritus, demonstrates how to check for cervical dilation.

Most ranches develop heifers fully, and use calving ease bulls to prevent calving difficulties. However, a few difficult births are going to occur each calving season. Using the concept of evening feeding to get more heifers calving in daylight, and giving assistance early will save a few more calves, and result in healthier more productive two-year-old cows to rebreed for next year. For more information on topics concerning assisting cows and heifers at calving time, download and read an Oklahoma State University circular E-1006 "Calving Time Management For Beef Cows and Heifers". This free publication can be downloaded from this website: <http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-5171/E-1006web.pdf>

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