

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

October 18, 2010

In this Issue:

Take a Second Look at Backgrounding Calves This Fall

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

Feeding Weaned Calves During a Pre-conditioning Program

Excerpts from Oklahoma State University Fact Sheet ANSI-3031, by Lalman and co-workers

Take a Second Look at Backgrounding Calves This Fall

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

Often a cattle producer can make the best return when you can do what the market needs done at a time when it is difficult for anyone else to do it. Right now, the market wants feeder cattle to have additional weight before going to the feedlot. This has been the general tendency for some time but is enhanced even more with the recent jump in corn prices. Stocker producers normally oblige the market by putting on the additional weight but winter time is more tricky than summer when there is lots of green forage. In the southern plains, grazing winter wheat usually provides a home to many feeder calves being marketed in the fall run.

However, the lack of rain for the past month means that very little wheat pasture is available or likely to be available very soon. As a result calf prices have dropped more than previously expected due to the lack of stocker cattle demand. This sets up a situation where cow-calf producers should consider the feasibility of implementing some sort of backgrounding program for weaned calves.

Retained ownership allows cattle producers to change the timing of animal sales which may have marketing advantages. I don't often recommend using retained ownership strictly as a marketing tool. After all, holding calves into a stocker or backgrounding program means that the producer is taking on a new cattle production activity. It has to work and be feasible from a production standpoint before it can help with marketing. This means evaluating the resources required; feed, facilities and labor, to be sure you can manage the health of the animals and put together a nutritional program that will provide acceptable gains. This may involve standing forage or hay along with some supplement. It might be grazing, semiconfinement or a drylot situation.

If it is feasible, this may be the ideal time to consider retaining calves. The additional weight gain is needed and the stocker industry does not have the forage to do it as easily as usual. The value of gain provides the incentive to look at more creative stocker or backgrounding programs. Last week in Oklahoma, 519 pound steers were priced at \$115.07/cwt. and 680 pound steers had a price of \$110.34/cwt. This means that the value of an extra 161 pounds of gain on the steer was \$0.95 per pound. Can you design a backgrounding program to put weight on and provide a decent return relative to this value?

Of course, the market price may change before we actually have the extra weight gain. It is not without risk but it is a calculated risk. Corn is likely to stay high and the value of the weight gain will remain strong. If it rains soon in the southern plains, the demand for stocker may rebuild and one could choose whether to continue with the backgrounding program or go ahead and sell the animals. Either way there is relatively little downside risk in putting on another 100 to 300 pounds on weaned calves. The futures market is volatile but does provide an opportunity to lock in the margin on weight gain and reduce the price risk for feeder cattle. A little creativity in designing a backgrounding program could be worth the effort this fall.

Feeding Weaned Calves During a Pre-conditioning Program

(Excerpts from OSU Fact Sheet ANSI-3031)

In Oklahoma, a minimum of a 45-day weaning period is recommended to maximize the benefits of preconditioning. A balanced nutrition program during this period is critical to ensure profitability for the

cow/calf producer and maximum immune system function during the stressful weaning period and later production phases.

Oklahoma cattle operations vary in resources, forage species, and management systems. Consequently, one preconditioning management and nutrition program cannot be prescribed. General management considerations and several specific nutritional program options are suggested in the OSU Fact Sheet ANSI-3031 listed below.

High quality pasture alternatives may not be available. In these cases, hay coupled with supplementation or concentrate-feeding programs can be implemented. The number of nutrition program alternatives is virtually unlimited.

Table 1 includes several rations for calves receiving free-choice, high quality grass hay, with a target gain between 1 to 1.7 pounds per day. Separate rations are suggested for hay containing greater than 10% protein and prairie hay, or other warm season grass hays that typically contain between 6 and 10% protein. Lower quality hay (less than 6% protein) is not recommended for preconditioning calves. The producer has the option of providing calcium and phosphorus sources (such as limestone and dicalcium phosphate), micro minerals (such as copper, zinc and selenium), vitamins A and E, and feed additives in the feed or in a free-choice mineral mix.

Table 1. Rations for growing calves receiving free-choice high quality grass hay (% as fed).

Ingredient	Ration Number					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
High Quality Fescue, Bermudagrass, Wheat or Sudan Hay (minimum of 10% protein)						
Commercial feed product, 12 to 14% protein	100					
Wheat middlings		68.0				
Corn or Milo		15.0	81.0		39.0	19.5
Soybean hulls		15.0		87.0		65.0
Wheat					48.0	
Soybean or cottonseed meal			16.0	10.0	10.0	13.0
Limestone		2.0	2.0	1.0	2.0	1.0
Dicalcium phosphate			1.0	2.0	1.0	1.5
Salt/mineral mix	Salt only	Free-choice	Free-choice	Free-choice	Free-choice	Free-choice
High Quality Prairie Hay (minimum of 6% protein)						
Commercial feed product, 16 to 20% protein	100					
Wheat middlings		83.0				
Corn or Milo			69.0		24.0	23.0
Soybean hulls				72.0		45.0
Wheat					48.0	
Soybean or cottonseed meal		15.0	28.0	25.0	25.0	29.0
Limestone ^b		2.0	2.0	1.0	2.0	1.5
Dicalcium phosphate ^b			1.0	2.0	1.0	1.5
Salt/mineral mix ^c	Salt only	Free-choice	Free-choice	Free-choice	Free-choice	Free-choice

^a Feed ration at the rate of 0.8 to 1.2% of body weight (i.e. 4 to 6 lbs to 500 lb calves).

^b Limestone and dicalcium phosphate are sources of calcium and phosphorus. If these ingredients are not available, increase the soybean or cottonseed meal by two or three percent, according to the ration used.

^c Vitamin A can be added to the ration to include a minimum of 5,000 international units (IU) per pound of feed, or it can be supplied through a fresh commercial salt/mineral product. A feed additive, such as Bovatec[®], Rumensin[®], Gainpro[®] or chlortetracycline should be provided through the feed or salt/mineral mix.

Other feeding suggestions, including rations using alfalfa hay, and self-fed rations are available in the [OSU Fact Sheet “Nutrition and Management Considerations for Preconditioning Home Raised Beef Calves” ANSI-3031.](#)

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This includes but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services. References within this publication to any specific commercial product, process, or service by trade name, trademark, service mark, manufacturer, or otherwise does not constitute or imply endorsement by Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service.

