COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

December 6, 2010

In this Issue:

Cattle Market Signals Become More Pronounced

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

If allowed to work freely, markets will provide whatever signals are needed to take care of any market situation. Right now, cattle markets are providing increasingly dramatic signals to address several needs in the industry. Cattle and beef markets across the board have jumped sharply in the past two weeks and both Live Cattle and Feeder Cattle futures prices suggest that we are in for an extended period of largely unprecedented cattle prices.

The signals are quite obvious. Calf prices will go higher and higher until there is sufficient incentive to increase cow-calf production. The predicament that we find ourselves in now is that current feeder values are very high and going higher, which makes it difficult to retain heifers and yet we have to push calf prices overall high enough to make the value of future production enough to encourage heifer retention. This process is typical of every cattle cycle but never before have we been in such limited numbers that the tradeoff was quite so dramatic.

The other prevailing signal is the need to reduce use of expensive feed grains and thus to encourage more forage based gains. Thus, despite very high prices especially for calves, the value of additional weight gain continues to be very strong, encouraging more weight gain outside of feedlots. This stocker value of gain only occurs at heavy feeder weights as there is a steep rollback in prices for feeders up to 600 pounds.

The final incentive is that enhanced cow-calf values and enhanced stocker values make forage worth more. This has implications on the general value of forage for both rangeland and improved pasture areas and has specific regional implications. Enhanced pasture value suggests increased forage production but most of the discretionary pasture areas also compete with enhanced crop values thereby limiting forage expansion. In areas like the Southeast, high fuel prices add an additional shipping disadvantage to cattle production in that region. In contrast, cattle production in the Western Great Plains and Intermountain Rockies clearly have a relative regional advantage in cattle production. These regional adjustments are long term in nature. Over time, we will likely see feedlot production shift marginally back to the Midwest and cow-calf and especially stocker production shift marginally more to the Central Plains and Rocky Mountain regions.

Start Mineral Program Now to Avoid Grass Tetany in Mature Cows on Wheat Pasture

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Animal Scientist

A lack of moisture in many areas of Oklahoma has limited the growth of wheat pasture, nevertheless, some cow calf producers will use wheat pasture as winter feed for spring-calving cows. Grass tetany, caused by magnesium deficiency does not seem to be a major problem in Oklahoma although occasional cases are reported. It typically occurs in beef cows during early lactation and is more prevalent in older cows. The reason is thought to be that older cows are less able to mobilize magnesium reserves from the bones than are younger cows. Grass tetany most frequently occurs when cattle are grazing lush immature grasses or small grains pastures and tends to be more prevalent during periods of cloudy weather. Symptoms include incoordination, salivation, excitability (aggressive behavior towards humans) and, in final stages, tetany, convulsions and death.

It is known that factors other than simply the magnesium content of the forage can increase the probability of grass tetany. High levels of potassium in forages can decrease absorption of magnesium and most lush, immature forages are high in potassium. High levels of nitrogen fertilization have also been shown to increase the incidence of tetany although feeding protein supplements has not. Other factors such as the presence of certain organic acids in tetany-causing forages have been linked with tetany. It is likely that a combination of factors, all related to characteristics of lush forage are involved.

When conditions for occurrence of tetany are suspected, cows should be provided mineral mixes containing 12 to 15 percent magnesium and be consumed at 3 to 4 ounces per day. It is best for the supplements to be started a couple of months ahead of the period of tetany danger so that proper intake can be established. Because tetany can also occur when calcium is low, calcium supplementation should also be included. Symptoms of tetany from deficiencies of both minerals are indistinguishable without blood tests and the treatment consists of intravenous injections of calcium and magnesium gluconate, which supplies both minerals.

Cows grazing lush small grain pastures should be fed mineral mixes containing both calcium and magnesium.

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.