

# **COW/CALF CORNER**

## **The Newsletter**

**From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service**

**January 17, 2011**

### **In this Issue:**

#### **Cattle Prices: How High is High?**

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

#### **Cold Weather Cow Care**

Dave Sparks DVM, Oklahoma State University Area Extension Food Animal Quality and Health Specialist

#### **BeefExtension.com Website is a Source of Research-based Information**

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Specialist and Chris Richards, Oklahoma State University Beef Nutritionist

#### **Cattle Prices: How High is High?**

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

Feeder and fed cattle prices are at or near all time highs and are poised to keep moving higher. Both Feeder and Live cattle futures suggest that higher prices are yet to come. In several recent meetings and conversations with producers, I am seeing a couple of reactions to the current situation. There seems to be an overall feeling of disbelief or a sense that there is another shoe to fall. The basic question seems to be one of “Is this for real?”. Given everything we have been through in recent years and the amount of volatility in most input and output markets, such hesitancy is understandable. It is easy to remember corn and wheat markets in 2008 which soared to astronomical heights for a brief period of time. Are cattle markets in the same situation: set for a wild but short-lived ride into the stratosphere?

The real answer is, of course, is that no one can be sure how this will play out. We have never been in a situation like this before. However, when the factors that put us in this situation are considered, there is good reason to believe this is not a flash in the pan that will fizzle quickly. Unlike grain markets in 2008, cattle markets are not reacting merely to the short run impacts of market shocks. There are numerous factors at work, most of which are longer run in nature and will persist for the foreseeable future. Although the phrase “perfect storm” is overused, it may apply to the 2011 cattle market situation.

The underlying supply situation that is the major driving factor has been developing since the early 2000s, when roving droughts across the U.S. extended the last major cyclical herd liquidation. The BSE shocks in 2003 pushed the industry to new levels of intensity with tight feeder supplies offset by placing ever younger and lighter cattle into feedlots. This reaction worked well as long as corn was cheap. By 2004, prices had reached a level that resulted in limited herd expansion in 2004 and 2005. In 2006, the world changed with grain prices jumping to new levels which have continued fundamentally higher and provoke long term beef industry adjustments that continue to this day. The loss of profitability due to high and volatile input prices since late 2006 also prompted additional liquidation which led to the extremely tight numbers we see today.

The point is that there are some very solid reasons why we are seeing record cattle prices and still have expectations for even higher prices. Limited cattle numbers, high grain prices that temper carcass weights, and the need to reduce heifer and cow slaughter all suggest that supplies will tighten significantly in 2011 compared to recent years. A continuation of strong export

demand and indications of recovery in domestic beef demand will allow cattle and beef prices to move higher. Just how high? No one knows...the key is demand and just how much higher prices can be supported. As is typical, the market will probably overshoot at some point and pull back a bit to reveal what the top really is. It does not appear we are close to that level yet and even when we do, we will likely stay at historically high levels for some time. The situation that led us to this point has been a decade in the making and will not unravel very quickly.

## **Cold Weather Cow Care**

Dave Sparks DVM, Oklahoma State University Area Extension Food Animal Quality and Health Specialist

Winter brings a special set of challenges for cattle producers. The need for labor and management increase just as forage quality, feed availability, and hours of daylight available to get things done decrease. Just in case this doesn't offer enough of a challenge, this is also calving season when we are bringing into the operation the product we will have to turn into profits in order to be here next winter.

The first consideration each day in winter time livestock care should be water. Water is the first limiting nutrient and although daily intake goes down in cold weather, adequate consumption every day is still vital. Cows can't utilize frozen water. They may be able to meet part of their water requirement on a temporary basis by eating snow, but they also expend calories melting the snow and warming it to body temperature. If you water your cows in ponds be sure to cut ice at least once daily. Feed the cows in the area where you have provided access to the pond water, so they can find it before it freezes again. When cattle are thirsty they walk out on the ice, especially if it has snow on it, and can follow through in a bunch when they encounter thinner ice near the center of the pond. If you water your cattle in tanks, be aware that extended cold weather may result in a tank full of ice with no room for water. One producer painted the south sides of his tanks black to absorb more solar energy. While it didn't completely solve ice problems, it worked well in marginal conditions and helped slow the ice buildup in extreme cold weather. Another idea that has been used successfully is to secure a large, black inflated inner tube in the tank where the cattle can drink out of the hole in the center. The water in the center of the tube will remain open except in the most extreme conditions. If you use automatic

waterers , check them daily to avoid catastrophe. They can only meet the water requirements of the cattle if they keep working normally. If a heater quits or a lid doesn't close properly they can freeze up fast. With electric waterers or tank heaters be careful for shorts or bare wire. Stray voltage of only a few volts can cause cattle not to drink.

While warm, bedded, barns would be above the aspirations of most beef cows, some shelter should be provided, at least from the wind. Solid or semi-solid fences, trees, or brush areas are usually adequate. Three sided sheds are better, but must be cleaned out occasionally to avoid other problems.

Cattle are warm blooded creatures and must maintain a constant core temperature. Everyone knows that nutritional requirements increase in cold weather, but few stockmen know how much the energy requirement changes. Critical temperature is defined as the lower end of the cow's comfort zone and is the temperature at which you need to increase feed provided. Hair and fat both serve as insulators. The critical temperature for cows with good winter coats and good body condition is 20° F. As the temperature drops below this you need to feed these cows about 1% more for each degree drop below the critical temperature. For thin or short haired cows the critical temperature is about 30°F and you will need to feed an extra 2% for each degree below this. When cows are wet the critical temperature is about 50° F.

Some health concerns, such as bovine respiratory disease, may not be as prevalent in cold weather as they are when there is a large difference between high and low daily temperatures. Other health problems, however, can take up the slack. Cold weather usually increases feet problems. Frozen rough ground causes abrasions on the feet. When the ground thaws, especially if it remains wet and muddy, conditions are ideal for the entry of infection at these abraded sites. Maintaining a graveled area around water sources and feeders can help a lot. Cattle tend to congregate more around feed grounds, which can become a high risk factor for calf pneumonia and calf diarrhea. Moving the feeding area around the pasture is a good idea, especially after the calves start to arrive. Internal and external parasites can also be a concern. While winter is not a high risk time for the spread of roundworms, those adult worms living in your cow's digestive system can be cheating you out of a lot of nutrition that your cows need. If you didn't worm your cows in the fall, worming in cold weather might stop this loss and help your cows get off to a better start on green grass in the spring. Lice can be a serious winter problem as well. Watch closely for dark discoloration around the head and face or excess scratching and rubbing. Control lice by spraying if you can find a warm sunny day. Powders work well if applied evenly when temperatures remain cold and wetting is not advisable.

For me (and for many of you) the biggest cold weather challenge is dealing with the desire to get it done and go to the fire. The days when it is hardest to work outside are the days when your cattle need you the most. A little extra time making sure your herd is comfortable, healthy and well fed now can make a lot of difference when you are looking at that sale barn check next fall.

## **BeefExtension.com Website is a Source of Research-based Information**

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Specialist and Chris Richards, Oklahoma State University Beef Nutritionist

Cattle producers now have an excellent tool in their “resource toolbox”. Oklahoma State University extension animal scientists have maintained an educational website designed to be a “one-stop shopping” destination for Oklahoma beef cattle producers. The website is [www.beefextension.com](http://www.beefextension.com) and contains access to many useful pieces of information for cow/calf, stocker, and feedlot managers.

One of the first features producers will notice as they view the website is the Calendar of Events. This listing of upcoming educational events for beef producers will include links to the registration forms and agendas for these programs. Producers will have easy access to “live” and “feeder” cattle futures markets as well as weather conditions for North Central Oklahoma.

Downloadable record forms for Beef Quality Assurance record-keeping, Country of Origin Labeling affidavits, and OSU decision-making software are also found on this website. The left-hand menu allows producers to choose specific topics that would be helpful to them. For example, a “cow-calf producer” could click on that link, then scroll down the menu items to “nutrition” and find fact sheets about feeding ideas for beef cows.

One of the most useful features of the website is the “search” box found at the top of the main page. For instance, a producer wishing to learn more about “nitrate toxicity” could type those words in the search box and find a listing of all of the items related to that topic found within the OSU Beef Extension publications.

Producers that need more personal assistance may want to click on the “Contact Us” button to locate a County Extension office near them. Cattle producers will want to check the [beefextension.com](http://beefextension.com) website often to stay up-to-date with changes in the calendar and new educational materials being added.

The “beefextension.com” website should be bookmarked by all beef producers for ready access to a great deal of valuable information.

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.