COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

February 14, 2011

In this Issue:

Winter Weather Creates Challenges for Cattle Producers and Markets

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Two major winter storms a week apart have cattle producers scrambling to care for animals and maintain production. Virtually all sectors of cattle and beef markets have been impacted by theses storms. In Oklahoma, new snowfall and cold temperature records have pushed producers and cattle well out their normal operating ranges. Winter weather also disrupts markets and it will take some time for ripple effects of the storms to work their way out of the system.

Spring calving cows are either calving now or will be shortly. These cows are vulnerable nutritionally and nutritional stress could cause weak calves and more death loss this spring and/or poor rebreeding that could affect the 2012 calf crop. It is important to provide adequate quantity and quality of feed for cows in order to avoid loss of condition that may not be apparent until after cows calve and begin lactating. Stocker cattle, for the most part, probably experienced poor performance and perhaps some weight loss for several days. It does not appear that there was any widespread death loss due to the storms. Many cattle on wheat had limited forage availability and have already moved to market or will be moving very soon. Several cattle auctions in Oklahoma were closed due to the storms but should be back open as usual this week.

Likewise, it does not appear that feedlots experienced major cattle losses due to the storms, at least in the Southern Plains, though cattle no doubt lost some weight. It will take some time for cattle to recover lost weight but it does not appear that the weather will result in major fed cattle market impacts. The amount of moisture in the two snow events was limited and concerns about muddy pens that often follow winter storms will be less than usual. The weather impacts will, however, temper some concerns about slaughter rates and beef production in the first quarter of the year. The weather impacts on markets may not be great but are, in any event, supportive to a supply driven market.

Boxed beef prices dropped this last week and may be an indication of demand resistance to higher prices. However, the storm disrupted both consumption and beef shipments so the true state of beef demand is not clear at this time. It will take several days to reestablish the normal movement of beef. It is not uncommon and unexpected to see boxed beef prices drop a bit after the strength of the last month. Demand will be better indicated by the presence or absence of follow-through buying as we move into the middle of March.

Breeding Heifers on Wheat Pasture

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

To say that wheat pasture is “short” is an understatement for many areas of Oklahoma this year. However, some producers may still have questions about the utilization of wheat pasture for growing replacement heifers before, during, and after their first breeding season. Unsatisfactory

breeding performance has occasionally been anecdotally reported when replacement heifers have been exposed to bulls or AI while grazing wheat forages. Therefore an Oklahoma State University study was conducted to compare reproductive performance of heifers grazing wheat pasture before, and during breeding, with heifers grazing wheat pasture until approximately 3 weeks before breeding.

In each of two years, 40 spring born Angus and Angus crossbred heifers were placed on wheat pasture in December and randomly assigned to one of two treatment groups in mid March. Group one (Wheat Pasture; n=20) remained on wheat pasture (mean crude protein = 26.6 %) through estrus synchronization and fixed-time AI. Group two (Dry Lot; n=20) was placed in drylot and had free choice access to a corn-based growing ration (11.1% crude protein) through estrus synchronization and fixed time AI. The heifers were inseminated on about April 5 both years. Heifers were exposed to fertile bulls starting 10 days after fixed time AI for 45 more days. Fixed time AI conception was determined at 32 days after AI by ultrasonography.

The percentage of heifers cycling at the start of estrous synchronization was 75% and 55% for Wheat Pasture and Dry Lot, respectively. Weights of Dry Lot heifers were slightly heavier than Wheat Pasture heifers (897 vs. 867 pounds) at the time of AI but were similar at ultrasound (917 vs. 910 pounds). Conception rate to Fixed time AI was similar for Wheat Pasture (54%) and Dry Lot (43%) and final pregnancy rate was similar for Wheat Pasture (98%) and Dry Lot (88%). Reproductive performance of heifers grazing wheat pasture during estrus synchronization and Fixed time AI was similar to heifers consuming a corn-based growing diet. Source: Bryant and co-workers. 2011. February issue. The Professional Animal Scientist.