

Cow Calf Corner Newsletter for April 4, 2011

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COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

April 4, 2011

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Southern Plains Drought Is No Longer A Developing Problem; It Is Here Now

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

I have driven across a wide swath of Oklahoma and north Texas as well as a bit of Kansas the past couple of weeks and it is clear that from this point on the drought impacts will develop rapidly. Forage is greening up quickly in north Texas and across Oklahoma but the green-up will be short lived without immediate moisture. Many livestock ponds are very low and will not sustain cattle long as temperatures warm. Parts of northeastern Oklahoma and eastern Kansas are slightly better compared to the rest of the region.

At this point, the drought is not so much of a market issue as it is an individual management issue. Though it is hard to detect in the current sky high prices, the drought may be impacting demand for summer grazing and may soon begin to have impacts on cull cow markets. These impacts will become more noticeable if the drought persists.

Producers need to act quickly to assess their forage and water situation in terms of any remaining

hay reserves and act to maximize the value of what little new forage growth occurs. In many cases, producers have little chance of maintaining normal stocking rates for any length of time without new forage and will have to invoke rather drastic culling plans soon unless relocation out of the region is a viable option. Relatively few drought options exist in this situation unless significant hay reserves are available. However, by acting soon, producers may be able to stretch limited forage for a core herd in hopes that moisture will arrive before all options are exhausted.

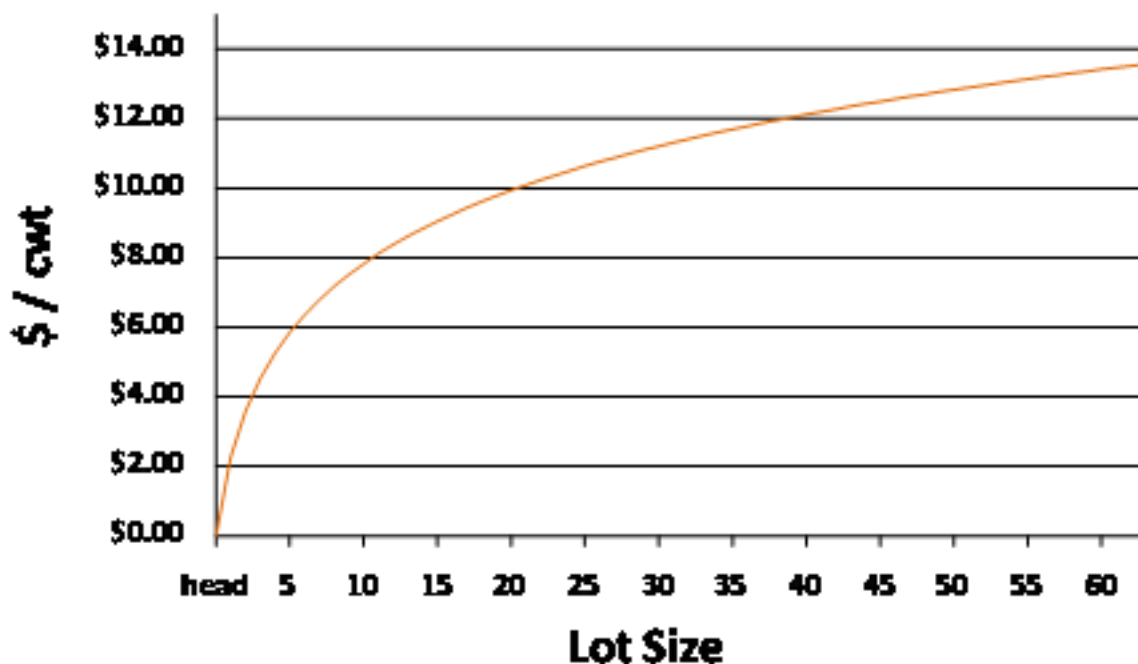
If producers are forced to sell cow-calf pairs, selling sooner rather than later is preferable. Producers with spring calves may be able to early wean and program feed the calves in a confinement backgrounding program. This option might work well to reduce the feed requirements for cows that then have a better chance to rough it until conditions improve. Thus a combination of selling some pairs and early weaning the remaining calves might provide a way to maintain a core herd.

Shorten The Breeding Season To Increase Calf Value

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

This may be the summer to finally do something about that long breeding and calving season in your cow herd. Shortening the breeding season should still result in a high percentage of cows bred and identify those that are difficult to get bred so they may be removed from the herd next fall. If forage and hay supplies are short, culling the late-calvers will be an aid in the long term efficiency of the herd. Early weaning (at about 6 to 8 months of age) can also help some late calving cows rebreed earlier than if they continue to nurse a calf. Shortening the breeding and calving seasons will pay off in heavier, and more uniform groups of calves to sell at weaning time. If a cow operation can market a sizeable number of calves together in one lot, they will realize a greater price per pound (on the average) than similar calves sold in singles or small lots. Proof of this concept is presented here in data from the Oklahoma Quality Beef Network sales in 2010.

Lot Size Premium at 2010 OQBN Sales



A premium for uniform, multiple head lots is generally attributed to the convenience of filling orders for cattle of a specified description on the part of an order buyer. Also, larger, uniform lots may indicate a single point of origin for the cattle leading to less stress and fewer health problems as may be associated with pens of “put-together” cattle. Small cow/calf operations can take advantage of these price differentials only by achieving 2 month (or shorter) breeding seasons so that the calves are born in a short period of time and are of similar age and weight at sale time. This stresses the need for cows in good body condition at calving and fertile bulls used only in short breeding seasons.

Aging Cows 101 Field Days Are Coming This Spring

Jeff Jaronek, Oklahoma Beef Council

Beef producers from across the state will have an opportunity to increase their herd’s productivity at Aging Cows 101 Field Days scheduled for this spring.

Hosted by the Oklahoma Beef Council through the beef checkoff program, the field days will focus on teaching producers the necessary tools to determine how culling cows at the proper time

and retaining replacements can help maximize producers' profitability.

The field days will be held at:

- McAlester Union Stockyards – May 12, 2011
- Durant Stockyards – May 16, 2011
- Beaver River Livestock Auction – May 18, 2011
- Elk City Livestock Auction – May 21, 2011
- Blackwell Livestock Auction – May 25, 2011
- Stilwell Livestock Auction – May 27, 2011

“We are pleased to offer the Aging Cows 101 Field Days across the state to help producers understand the importance of maintaining vitality in their herd,” said Jeff Jaronek, director of industry relations for the Oklahoma Beef Council. “The information we will share with them will certainly help boost their bottom line.”

Producers will be given a hands-on opportunity to evaluate teeth wear to determine the age of cattle and experience other areas of Beef Quality Assurance (BQA).

“We continue to encourage beef producers to implement BQA practices in their herd management program,” Jaronek said. “It can open doors to new marketing opportunities for participating producers and help them become more competitive.”

Lunch for the field days will be sponsored by Novartis. For more information and to view a complete agenda, visit <https://mail.okstate.edu/owa/redirect.aspx?C=3950c75412e2445b9151bf618a5b2482&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.oklabeef.org>. Please RSVP to Jeff Jaronek at (405) 840-3777 or by email at <https://mail.okstate.edu/owa/redirect.aspx?C=3950c75412e2445b9151bf618a5b2482&URL=mailto%3ajeff.jaronek%40oklabeef.org>.

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