

Cow Calf Corner Newsletter for May 23, 2011

Selk, Glenn [glenn.selk@OKSTATE.EDU]

Sent: Monday, May 23, 2011 10:42 AM

To: CCCORNER@LISTSERV.OKSTATE.EDU

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

May 23, 2011

In this Issue:

Beating the Bushes for Feeder Cattle

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

Evaluate Udder Soundness Now to Use as Culling Criteria Next Fall

Glenn Selk, OSU Professor Emeritus, Oklahoma State University

Beating the Bushes for Feeder Cattle

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

For several months I have been anticipating that tight feeder supplies would catch up with feedlots and feedlot placements would have to decrease due to a lack of cattle. I still think that will happen but, I confess, I continue to be amazed at the cattle industry's ability to wring out feeder supplies to an extent unlike anything we have seen before. The May Cattle on Feed report shows feedlot inventories up seven percent over this time last year. However, it should be noted that the May 1 inventory is only 101.4 percent of the previous five year average and highlights the fact that we are still comparing to a small year-ago value.

April placements were up 10 percent year over year and were up nearly 13 percent over the previous five year average for April. It is a big placement number by any measure. This highlights the obvious question of where feedlots continue to find these numbers of feeder cattle to place. It is necessary to look at the placement weight breakdown and regional patterns, along with other data to understand just how unique the current situation truly is.

The placement weight breakdowns show a bimodal placement pattern that reflects what cattle feeders would like to versus what they are able to do. With high cost of gain and expectations for continued high feed costs, feedlots have an incentive to place heavy feeders. Indeed, of the increase in April placements, 31 percent were feeder cattle over 800 pounds. Placements weighing between 600 to 800 pounds accounted for only 16 percent of total April placements. The biggest part of the placements was feeder cattle weighing less than 600 pounds, which accounted for 52 percent of total placements. These cattle will not be marketed until roughly November. Despite high feed costs, feedlots are placing very lightweight calves...calves that would typically be part of feeder supplies later in the year.

State to state comparisons of the placements is also instructive. Most of the increase in placements

occurred in the Southern Plains. Placements were up in Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. In Texas, where placements were up by a total of 110,000 head, 73 percent consisted of cattle weighing less than 600 pounds. Many of these lightweight cattle consisted of Mexican cattle that are directly entering feedlots rather than grazing as stockers. The lightweight placements likely also included some drought forced early weaning, especially fall born calves. Some of the 28 percent of Texas placements weighing more than 600 pounds were likely heifers diverted from planned replacements due to the drought conditions. The weight breakdown in Kansas shows that most of the increase consisted of feeders over 700 pounds. This likely included mostly yearling stockers but may have also included some heifers originally planned for herd replacements.

Feedlot placements were also up in California, Arizona and Idaho. Although there is no weight breakdown of placements in those states it is highly likely that most of the increase was in lightweight dairy calves. Calf slaughter for the nation was down 13 percent in April and is down 11 percent for the year to date. Though calf slaughter is minor compared to total cattle slaughter, this is one more small increment to boosting placements in the short run. In contrast, April placements were down in Colorado, Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota. The decrease is consistent with the cool, wet conditions and limited feeder supplies in the region. In Nebraska, placements of feeders over 800 pounds were up slightly but were more than offset by decreased placements in all other weight categories.

One final unique contributor to larger feedlot inventories is decreases in the other disappearance category of the Cattle on Feed report. Other disappearance occurs for several reasons but at this time of the year often includes some lightweight cattle that initially arrive at feedlots then return to pasture when forage conditions improve. This is happening much less this year. In fact, other disappearance has been down year over year for each of the last six months. Like calf slaughter, other disappearance is a minor factor but these two, combined with direct placement of Mexican feeder cattle is indicative of the very unique situation and the intensity with which feeder markets are beating the bushes to find feeder cattle supplies.

The vacuum of feeder cattle supplies would already be very apparent without increased Mexican cattle imports, which are unlikely to continue at current rates; reduced veal production, which is already projected to show a nearly 10 percent annual decrease; drought forced calf and replacement heifer sales, which are likely mostly done at this point; and reduced other disappearance, which is already at minimal levels. The increasingly steep downhill slope of feeder supplies is turning a precipice over which we are likely to fall in the next month or two...unless the market can pull another rabbit, or more feeder cattle, out of the hat once again.

Evaluate Udder Soundness Now to Use as Culling Criteria Next Fall

Glenn Selk, OSU Professor Emeritus, Oklahoma State University

Every year at "preg" checking time, ranchers evaluate cows and make decisions as which to remove from the herd. One criteria that should be examined to cull cows is udder quality. Beef cattle producers are not as likely to think about udder health and shape as are dairy producers, but this attribute affects cow productivity and should be considered. It may be easier to be accurate in your culling decisions, if you exam the udder soundness of the cows shortly after calving when they are at the peak of lactation and the udder is as large as at any time. Take time now during the peak of lactation to write down which cows have unsound udders.

Ranchers may be surprised to find that about 2/3 of the range cows tested experimentally were infected

with one or more mastitis-causing bacteria in one or more quarters. Two previous studies (one in 1977 and another in 1983), indicated that the occurrence of clinical mastitis in the beef cows herds were 17.5% and 11.9%, respectively. These caused reduced weaning weights of 12.5% and 7.3%, respectively. A later study (1986) of beef cows found a higher percentage of clinical mastitis of 37%. The weaning weight loss of calves nursing infected cows was 9.6% and these researchers noted an economic loss of \$31.43 per calf (with much lower than today's calf prices) due to occurrence of mastitis in the dam. The presence of the organisms does not necessarily mean that the cow has clinical mastitis and her milk production will suffer. It is known that the incidence of dry quarters increase with cow age.

An experiment conducted recently at the Range Cow Research Center near Stillwater gives some indication as to the impact of mastitis on beef cow performance. Also the Oklahoma State University scientists examined the effects of intramuscular treatment with "long-acting" oxytetracycline at weaning time and again at calving on the subsequent milk production and calf weaning weights. They found that cows with one or two dry quarters had calves with severely reduced weaning weights (50 - 60 pounds) compared to cows with no dry quarters. Treatment of cows at the previous weaning and/or after calving with the long-acting oxytetracycline did not influence calf weaning weight.

The heritability estimates of udder characteristics are variable. A study done in Brahman cattle for the heritability of udder soundness indicated that progress could be made by selecting for udder soundness. They reported that 25% of the differences in udder soundness was due to genetics. Beef Improvement Federation Guidelines have suggested that the heritability of udder soundness in beef cattle is estimated at .16 to .22 which means that some progress can be made by selecting against unsound udders.

An evaluation system for udder soundness has been developed and used by some breeds. Teat shape and udder suspension are the two primary characteristics evaluated. Below are drawings representing sound udders on the left and unsound udders on the right.

The first two drawings are teat shape. The very "funnel" shaped teat may have been mastitic in the past. New born calves will find it difficult to nurse such a teat.



Teat Shape (above) : Note the large "funnel-shaped" teats on the cow on the right



Udder Suspension (above): Weak udder suspension leads to "pendulous" broken-down udders that also are very difficult for young calves to nurse.

Both cows on the right would be excellent candidates for culling this fall.

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.