

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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The Clock is Ticking Away on Winter Wheat Pasture Prospects

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

The window of opportunity for planting winter wheat for grazing is rapidly closing. In Oklahoma, dual-purpose or forage-only winter wheat generally needs to be planted by mid-September in order to produce significant fall and winter forage. Wheat planted for grain-only has about another month to be in the ideal planting window. It will take two to three significant moisture events in order to establish and support fall wheat forage growth and the first of those events needs to happen in the next week or so. There is some chance for limited rain showers this coming week which likely represent the last chance for early planting of wheat for forage.

Winter wheat grazing normally supports a large winter stocker industry in Oklahoma. The January 1 estimate of feeder cattle outside of feedlots has averaged about 2.3 million head the last ten years. This value includes roughly a million head of stocker cattle that are brought into Oklahoma for winter grazing in addition to stocker cattle retained from Oklahoma's 1.9 million head calf crop. These in-shipments of cattle will be drastically reduced given current prospects for winter wheat pasture.

The extreme drought conditions has resulted in severely reduced hay and pasture production and now seems likely to limit winter wheat forage to a small fraction of normal production. Many calves in Oklahoma have already been marketed as early weaned calves and have moved to feedlots or to better forage out of state. That fact, combined with few calves brought in as stockers may result in an Oklahoma feeder supply on January 1, 2012 that is down by one million head or more.

Though more typically used for stocker grazing, for many cow-calf producers, winter wheat pasture represents the last hope for winter forage for cow herds this year. If wheat pasture were to develop this fall, a high proportion would likely be used to support cows and replacement heifers compared to stocker production. Although many cows have already been liquidated, additional liquidation is eminent without winter wheat pasture. The lack of wheat pasture and other forage also means that fewer replacement heifers than normal will be retained this year. Oklahoma appears to be headed for an unprecedented year to year decrease in total cattle inventories.

Why Not be Pro-active with Marketing Strategy??

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Many Oklahoma commercial cow calf ranchers do a great job of selecting, feeding, caring for, and taking to market top quality cattle, yet do very little, if anything, about promoting the products they sell. Perhaps most of us are not boastful by nature and hope that the quality of the calves we raise will speak for themselves. Nonetheless, doesn't it make sense that we would do everything in our power to assure that our calves bring top dollar at market time?

Recently I read of a commercial cow calf operator that "promotes" his calves. He is confident that his cattle are genetically sound and will perform well for the stocker operator or feedlot that purchases his calves. He pre-conditions the calves. They are properly vaccinated and weaned 45 days before he takes them to market. These management practices all have value to a potential buyer. Therefore, he makes certain that as many buyers as possible know when and where these calves will be offered for sale.

This producer keeps track of all of the previous buyers of his calves. He makes an effort to locate and contact other potential buyers of his weight and breed of calves. Then he composes a short letter telling them that he will be bringing his calves to XYZ Livestock Market on a given sale date. He will include information on the number, weight, breed makeup, and sex of the calves. He will also tell when the steers were castrated, implanted, and when the calves were vaccinated and which products he used. He makes certain that the buyers know that the calves were weaned on a certain date and how they have been fed since weaning. He includes data on previous calves (that have been evaluated in programs such as the O-K Steer Feedout) or closeout data from past buyers that fed out his calves. In other words, he is telling potential customers that they can buy his calves with additional confidence about their performance and their health.

Whether you participate in an organized Value-Added Calf program (i.e Oklahoma Beef Quality Network, or one sponsored by a pharmaceutical company or local livestock market) or whether you simply sell your calves on the regular sale date at the closest market, it makes good business sense to tell buyers that your good calves are available for sale. Don't just rely on others to tell your story. This fall promote the good quality, healthy cattle that you raise. They deserve it!!

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