

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Oklahoma Faces Historic Cattle Reduction Due to Drought

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Despite the fact that the last year has been the driest on record, the drought in Oklahoma seems to have had surprisingly large impacts very quickly. It is the nature of this drought that makes it so devastating. Most droughts affect part of a year but rarely the entire year. A typical summer drought evolves after, at least some forage growth and hay production has taken place. The drought comes on rather slowly and producers have more time to see and react to the evolving situation.

This drought has largely wiped out an entire year and popped out very suddenly and dramatically after a dry winter that emerged into a complete lack of spring. The result was sharp decreases in summer production of crops and forage and a nearly immediate need to begin reducing cattle numbers in Oklahoma. Given data and information available in mid-September, Table 1 presents my estimates for Oklahoma Cattle inventories on January 1, 2012.

Table 1. Estimated Drought Impacts on Oklahoma Cattle Inventory.

	January 1, 1000 Head			
	2011	2012*	Change	% Change
All Cattle and Calves	5,100	3,723	-1,377	-27.0
Beef Cows	2,036	1,780	-256	-12.6
Beef Heifers	355	239	-116	-32.7
Estimated Feeder Supply	2,120	1,102	-1,018	-48.0

*Forecast

If realized, the changes in Table 1 would represent largely unprecedented year to year impacts for both beef cow numbers and the all cattle inventory. Oklahoma experienced one year with a greater percentage change in beef cow numbers; in the 1970s, which was associated with the all-time peak then drop in cattle numbers. The only other years with double-digit decreases in beef cow numbers were 1924, 1935 and 1936, all with decreases less than 11 percent.

Oklahoma is heavily dependent on the stocker industry, especially winter stockers grazing wheat pasture. Dry conditions in the fall of 2010 sharply reduced winter grazing in the 2010/2011 period and there is little prospect of winter grazing for the 2011/2012 period. Oklahoma typically imports a significant number of stocker cattle from other states with the result that the estimated January 1 feeder supply for the state is usually the second largest in the nation and represents about 44 percent of the Oklahoma All Cattle and Calves inventory on January 1. This stocker proportion is higher than for any other state which means that the drought impact on the All Cattle and Calves inventory will be greater for Oklahoma than for any other state. Oklahoma will not be an importer of stocker cattle this year and will, in fact, be a significant exporter of stocker cattle based on the sizeable calf crop produced in the state. A 27 percent decrease in total cattle numbers will be, by far, the largest year to year decrease in the history of cattle in Oklahoma.

Regional impacts within the state vary widely. Cattle numbers may change minimally in the northeast and east central part of the state while the western regions and the Oklahoma Panhandle will likely see beef herds drop 20 to 25 percent and total cattle numbers drop 45 to 50 percent year over year. The central part of the state is expected to see beef cow numbers drop roughly 15 percent and total cattle numbers may be down by 30 to 35 percent.

The numbers in Table 1 are preliminary estimates and will no doubt change as more data becomes available into the last quarter of the year. Whatever the final numbers end up to be, there can be no doubt that this drought has had enormous impacts on the Oklahoma cattle industry and it will take several years, at a minimum, for the industry to fully recover.

Prolonged Labor Affects Post-calving Fertility

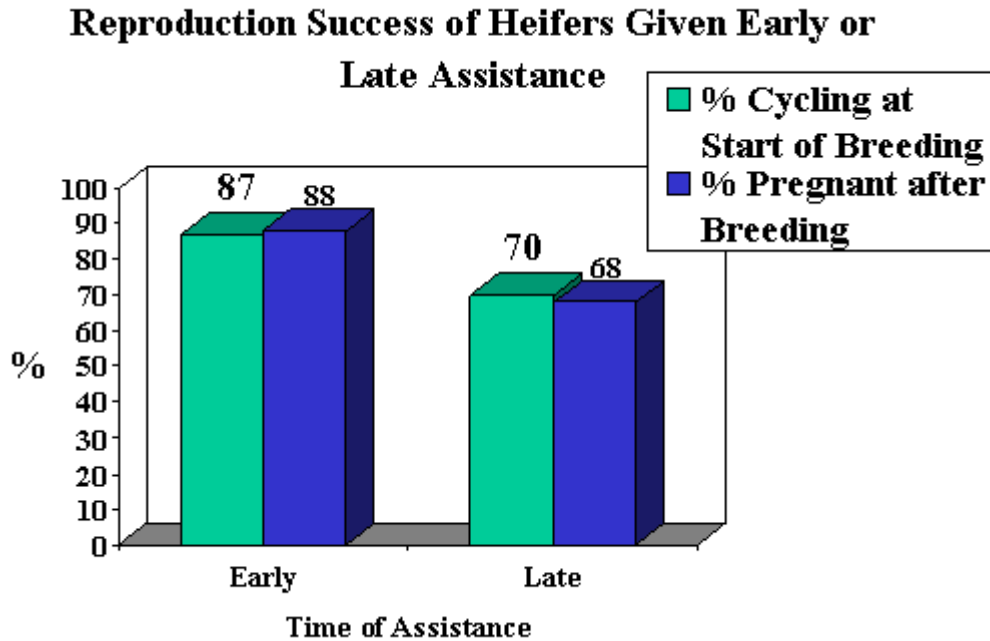
Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

For those producers that have not sold out due to the extreme drought, cow management goes on. Fall-calving season is in full swing in the Southern Plains. Spring calving will be here sooner than we think.

In addition to being the greatest cause of baby calf mortality, calving difficulty markedly reduces reproductive performance during the next breeding season.

Cattle suffering from calving difficulty have been reported to have pregnancy rates decreased by 16% and to calve 13 days later at the next calving. Results from a Montana study (Doornbos, et al., 1984) showed that heifers receiving assistance in early stage 2 of parturition returned to heat

earlier in the post-calving period and had higher pregnancy rates than heifers receiving traditionally accepted obstetric assistance. (Stage 2 of parturition is defined as the time from first appearance of the water bag until the calf is completely delivered.) In this study heifers were either assisted when the fetal membranes (water bag) appeared (EARLY) or were allowed to progress normally and assisted only if calving was not completed within two hours of the appearance of the water bag (LATE).



Heifers that were allowed to endure a prolonged labor had a 20% lower rate of cycling at the start of the next breeding season. In addition, the rebreeding percentage was 17% lower than the counterparts that were given assistance in the first hour of labor.

Prolonged deliveries of baby calves (in excess of 1 to 1.5 hours) often result in weakened calves and reduced rebreeding performance in young cows!

Early assistance should only be applied to heifers and cows after it has been determined that cervical dilation has been completed. If a producer is uncertain about how to properly examine a cow or heifer in labor, they should contact their local large animal veterinarian as soon as possible.

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