

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

September 26, 2011

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Two Stories in the Latest Cattle on Feed Report

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

The September Cattle on Feed report was a bit of a surprise; at least in some respects. Placements were well below the range of pre-report estimates at 99 percent of a year ago and that, combined with marketings at 107 percent of last year, which was on the upper end of the estimates, put the September 1, cattle on feed inventory at 105 percent of last year, noticeably less than the expected level of 108 percent.

The expectations for this report reflected a focus on one market factor but failed to anticipate the other story in this report. Widespread expectations that the drought was continuing to force cattle into the feedlot early were borne out dramatically by the sharp increase in placements in Texas, up 15 over year ago levels for the month, and by the placement weights, in which all of the increase was in the under 600 pound category. In total, placements of cattle weighing less than 600 pounds was up 44 percent, led by Texas, which was up 70 percent. In Nebraska, total placements were down, at 93 percent of last year, but placements of under 600 pound animals was up 63 percent year over year for the month. This likely reflects movement of lightweight feeder cattle out of the drought areas. There are indications that numerous cows have been placed in feedlots as well but it is unclear if the cows are accounted for in the cattle on feed total. The weight distribution would not suggest very many cows in the on-feed total but the COF questionnaire does not clarify cows versus steers and heifers on feed. Nevertheless, the drought impacts were much as anticipated and were very dramatic.

What was not well anticipated was the fact that, in absence of the drought, feeder supplies are extraordinarily tight and that led to significantly lower placements in some other parts of the country. Placements were down 15 percent in Kansas and 10 percent in Iowa and 7 percent in Nebraska. Placement weights tell the story even more dramatically. Though the lightest weight placements were up 44 percent, placements of cattle over 600 pounds was down 13.5 percent.

Poor feeding prospects likely also contributed to fewer placements, especially given the lack of heavy feeders available. Without the drought, total placements in July would have been substantially lower and in August would have well below last year and the on-feed total for September 1 would have been about even with last year.

What to expect for the rest of the year? Placements of lightweight feeders should decrease as most of those cattle have now moved out of drought areas or have reached higher weights. Additionally, imports and placement of lightweight Mexican cattle have dropped sharply after the state of Chihuahua dropped to a lower TB status in August, which will restrict feeder imports for the remainder of the year. Calves and summer stockers have performed excellently in areas north of Interstate 70, where forage quantity and quality have been very good. Those cattle will begin moving into feedlots in September and October, thus producing a somewhat more normal placement weight distribution. Lightweight calves from the southeast that usually move into winter grazing in the Southern Plains will likely move into other areas for backgrounding, though some will move directly into feedlots.

Though it is difficult to know what would have happened, it seem likely that some 500,000+ head of cattle were placed in July and August that would not have been placed until the fall without the drought. Drought impacts may continue but feeder movements from this point on are consistent with normal seasonal patterns. Cumulative feedlot placements for the year to date are up 3.5 percent despite the fact that estimated feeder supplies were down 3.3 percent in January and 2.5 percent in July. No doubt some potential replacement heifers have entered feedlots due to the drought and increased feeder imports have boosted feeder supplies but much of the difference is in the timing. Feedlot placements in September and October are likely to be down from year ago levels. Feedlots will have an increasingly difficult time maintaining inventories through the end of the year and into next year.

Breeding Soundness Exams are Important after Hot Summer

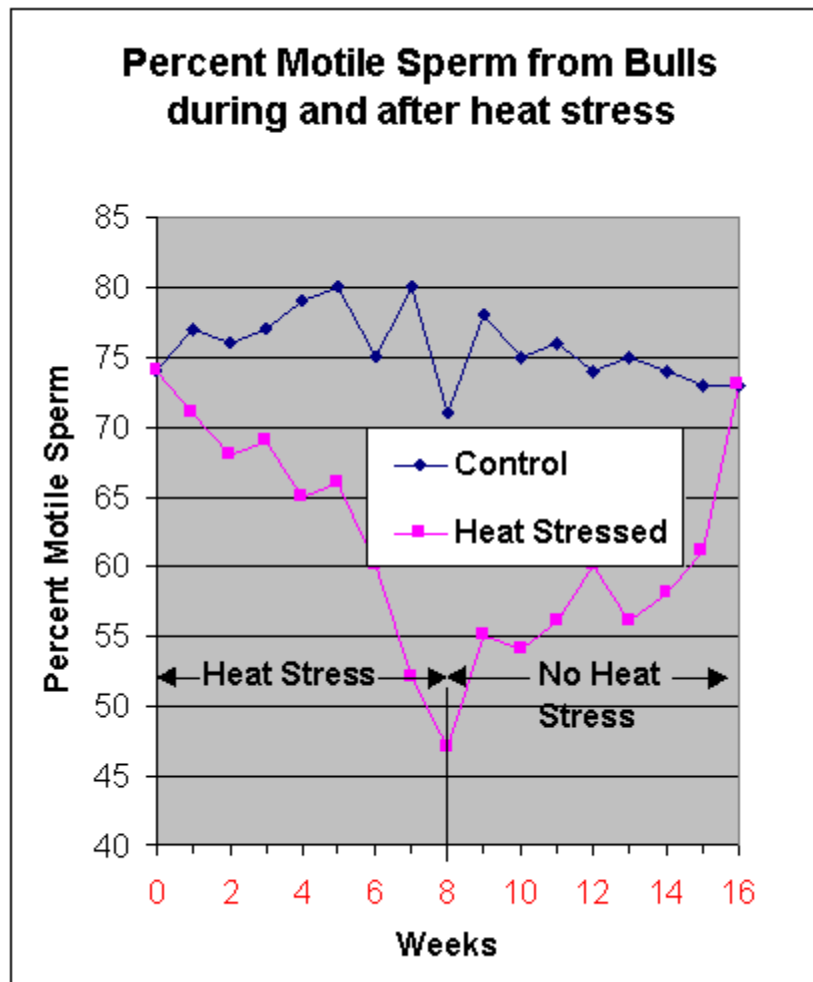
Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

As everyone in Oklahoma is already aware, the summer of 2011 was a record-setter. Many areas of the state had 70 or more days with over 100 degrees. Heat stress will undoubtedly take a toll on the spring and summer breeding season that has already occurred. However, those herds with fall-calving and fall breeding seasons may also feel the effects of last summer.

Before the fall breeding season begins, producers will want to contact their local veterinarian and schedule a time for the bulls to receive a "Breeding Soundness Exam." This is an excellent practice each year preceding the breeding season, but could be most important in years following very hot later summers. The extreme and persistent heat of this summer may have "heat-stressed" bulls as late as early September. Bulls that have been heat-stressed will require at least 2 months (from the conclusion of the stress) to fully recover.

Oklahoma scientists (Meyerhoeffer, et al 1978) placed bulls in controlled environments of 95 degrees F for eight hours and 87 degrees for the remaining 16 hours, while similar bulls were placed in environments of a consistent 73 degrees F. These treatments were applied to the bulls for eight weeks, and then all bulls were exposed to the 73 degrees environment for another eight weeks. During the treatment, the heat stressed bulls had rectal temperatures 0.9 degrees F higher than non-stressed bulls. The percentage of motile sperm cells decreased significantly in the stressed bulls by two weeks of heat stress.

Examine the graph below that illustrates sperm motility in bulls that were heat stressed and then allowed to return to a thermo-neutral environment. As you can tell, the bulls returned to normal sperm motility after 8 weeks. This coincides with the length of time needed for the complete development and maturation of new sperm cells in the testes. If bulls were ill or injured during this time, the elevated body temperature may have lingered causing further delay in the return to normal.



Assessing the "breeding soundness" now, would allow producers to make adjustments in the bull battery before the critical first weeks of the breeding season. If a bull is likely to be a poor performer, the producer has time to locate a replacement and not delay the start of next years' calf crop.

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