

# **COW/CALF CORNER**

## **The Newsletter**

**From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service**

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## **Drought Impacts May be Slowing Down**

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There are indications that the worst of the drought forced movements of cattle may be slowing down, at least for now. Beef cow slaughter in federal Region 6, has decreased each of the last three weeks, though the rate is still 19 percent above last year in the most recent week that data is available. Beef cow slaughter outside of Region 6 has also been higher than last year since late July but may be tapering off as well with a smaller increase in the most recent data. For the year to date, Region 6 slaughter is 24 percent above last year and combined with the rest of the country that has beef cow slaughter down a scant 2 percent, results in a national total year to date beef cow slaughter that is 105 percent of year ago levels.

With the bulk of the seasonal cow culling period coming in November, these totals could grow. However, there is some reason to think that much of the normal culling has already occurred and that seasonal culling will be smaller than usual. In Oklahoma, the auction totals for cows are still above year ago levels as well, but are down significantly from the extremely large volumes of the summer. Feeder cattle auction totals are currently close to year ago levels but may drop lower, if as expected, some of the normal fall run of calves has already occurred in drought forced early sales..

The latest Cattle on Feed report also shows a more normal pattern of placements without much obvious drought impacts. Total placements were down in Texas, though higher in the lightweight category. In fact, the under-600 pound weight group was the only group with an increase in placements indicating limited supplies of heavy feeder cattle. Overall, placements were even with a year ago and enough to hold cattle on feed totals even with last month at 105 percent of year ago levels. However, feedlot inventories should begin to drop for the remainder of the year and into next year. The biggest increase in feedlot placements occurred in Nebraska which was comprised of increases in both the lightest and heaviest placement categories.

Excellent forage conditions likely means that more big yearlings will be marketed out of the Northern Plains this fall but overall feeder supplies will be tight. Oklahoma feeder cattle prices, especially calves, have increased recently despite the lack of wheat pasture grazing this fall. A break in corn futures in early October, spurred feedlot demand for feeder cattle and offset the lack of wheat pasture grazing demand.

## **Using Wheat Pasture as a Winter Supplement for Cows and a Creep Feed for Calves**

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Short, drought-stressed native and Bermudagrass pastures and diminished hay supplies have some cow-calf producers looking at wheat pasture as a potential source of winter feed for cows. Continuous grazing by cows of small grain pastures can be expensive and wasteful. Limited grazing of wheat pasture has proven to be the best and also more efficient approach for utilizing this high-quality forage with mature beef cows. The protein requirements of a dry cow can be met by grazing her on wheat pasture for one day and returning her to dry pasture grass or hay for 2 - 3 days. A pattern of one day on wheat and 1 day off, should meet the protein needs of the same cow after calving. Limited grazing of wheat pasture forces the producer to trade time and labor for hay, supplement, and standing forages in pastures.

The day on wheat pasture should be defined as that amount of time required for the cow to graze her fill of wheat forage (3 - 5 hours) and not a full 24 hours. This short time on wheat allows the cow to gather adequate amounts of protein to carry her over the ensuing days on dry grass or hay. A 3 - 5 hour grazing limit helps to avoid the unnecessary loss of valuable forage due to trampling, bedding down and manure deposits. Under normal weather conditions in the fall, enough wheat forage should be accumulated by early December to supply the protein needs of about 1 to 1.5 cows per acre throughout the winter months when limit grazing is practiced. In many situations in 2011, the wheat was planted later than normal and with the lack of rainfall, stocking rates may need to be adjusted for poorer forage growth.

Wheat pasture creeps provide yet another alternative use of quality small grain pasture in the cow-calf operation. When dry grass pastures or haying areas are immediately adjacent to wheat pasture, the opportunity becomes available for small grain pasture creep feeding of fall-born calves. Creep gates, placed between the cow pasture and wheat field, will allow calves free access to wheat forage while restricting the cows to their dry pasture wintering area. Compared to dry wintered calves, nursing calves allowed access to quality forage of this type can improve their daily gain by .5 to .75 pounds per day.

Producers who decide to use continuous grazing programs, should watch out for the possibility of "grass tetany." Grass tetany will normally strike when cows are grazing small grain pastures in the early spring and the danger will tend to subside as hot weather arrives. A mineral deficient condition primarily due to calcium, and to a lesser degree to magnesium, is thought to be the major factor that triggers the disorder and normally affects older cows that are nursing calves under two to three months of age. Dry cows are seldom affected.

Risk of grass tetany can be reduced through the use of mineral supplements containing approximately 15% calcium and 12% to 15% magnesium. Read the research reports discussing management of cows on wheat pasture in the Oklahoma State University Animal Science Research Reports of [1991](#), [1993a](#), and [1993b](#),

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