COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

November 7, 2011

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Too Little, Too Late or Better Late Than Never?

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

Much of Oklahoma has received significant rain in the past couple of weeks and more is expected this week. The rain has improved everyone's mood and any rain anytime is appreciated at this point. However, the real value of the rain in the short run depends on who and where you are. From a wheat crop perspective, the rains are very beneficial and have improved crop conditions. Last week, the percent of wheat emerged had nearly caught up to the average for the date and only 15 percent of the crop was rated in poor or very poor condition. It does appear that some wheat will be available for grazing and some will be grazed despite being smaller than optimal because of the desperate need for feed. Most of the wheat will be used for cows and perhaps replacement heifers rather than for stockers, especially purchased stockers.

Beyond wheat, the rain at this time changes little from a cattle perspective. Current moisture may be beneficial for Fescue or other cool season grasses in the eastern part of the state but not much other forage production will happen at this point. More importantly, in the short run, the rain so far has not replenished stock water in ponds. However, with some moisture in the ground, there is a better chance that rains this week will result in some runoff to restore ponds. Lack of water will likely be the biggest factor behind additional cattle liquidation in the coming months without heavy rains.

Both feeder and cull cow prices are increasing. The auction volumes last week in Oklahoma for both feeder cattle and cows were 10 percent or less higher than the same time last year. That is the lowest year to year increase in several months. Feeder prices have been higher for the past few weeks and cull cow prices appear to have bottomed in late October and are likely to move sideways to higher for the remainder of the year. Two OQBN sales have been completed with

several more scheduled in November and December. Preliminary analysis suggests that the value added price premiums are significant for certified preconditioned calves. Volumes for the OQBN sales are holding remarkably well despite the drought conditions, though the sales so far have had a larger than typical mix of heifers relative to steers. This likely reflects the drought forced early sales of many of the steer calves.

Observe Bulls During the First Portion of The Fall Breeding Season

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

The fall breeding season is about to begin. Herds that aim for a September 1 first calving date, will turn bulls with the cows in the latter part of November. Bulls that have been recently added to the bull battery, and bulls that have not been used since last year, should pass a breeding soundness exam before the breeding season begins. Any newly purchased bull, that has been previously exposed to cows, should also have passed a test for the venereal disease "trichomoniasis". Reports from the Oklahoma state veterinarian indicate that 2.5% of bulls routinely tested have been found to be positive for this disease. Visit with your veterinarian soon about breeding soundness exams and "trich" tests to avoid reproductive problems next year and beyond.

A good manager keeps an eye on his bulls during the breeding season to make sure that they are getting the cows bred. Occasionally a bull that has passed a breeding soundness exam may have difficulty serving cows in heat, especially after heavy service.

While conducting a research trial several years ago, I was collecting data on the ability of a bull to breed synchronized cows. The bull (being observed) was mature and had been successfully used in the past. Also he had passed a breeding soundness exam. However, it was apparent immediately that he could no longer physically breed females in estrus. Replacing him immediately was the only solution. If we had not been present to observe the problem, an entire calf crop for that breeding pasture was in jeopardy.

Inability to complete normal service and low semen quality are more likely to be problems that affect breeding performance than failure to detect cows in heat. Nonetheless poor libido (sex drive) can occasionally be observed in beef bulls. Such problems can best be detected by observing bulls while they work. Therefore producers should (if at all possible) watch bulls breed cows during the first part of each breeding season. If problems are apparent, the bull can be replaced while salvaging the remainder of the breeding season and next year's calf crop. Likewise a small proportion of bulls can wear out from heavy service and lose interest. These, too, will need to be replaced. The greater the number of cows allotted to each bull in the breeding pasture the more critical it is that every bull be ready to work every day of the breeding season.

Injuries to bulls during the breeding season are relatively common. When a bull becomes lame or incapable of breeding, because of an injury to his reproductive tract, he needs to be removed from the breeding pasture and replaced with another bull.