

# **COW/CALF CORNER**

## **The Newsletter**

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#### **U.S. Beef Markets Growing Globally**

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Expanding global beef markets continue to add strength to U.S. cattle and beef markets. The latest trade data released by USDA that monthly exports were up 27 percent in the month of September. This level exactly matches the year over year increase in cumulative exports for the year to date. Through the first three quarters of 2011, beef exports have represented 10.7 percent of total U.S. beef production. This percent is likely to grow slightly for the entire year as continued strong exports in the fourth quarter will be matched against declining beef production.

Perhaps as important as the beef export total, is the broad-based nature of the growth in those markets. In percentage terms, the fastest growing market in 2011 has been Russia, up 83 percent for the year to date. However, at that level Russia still only represents 5.6 percent of total beef exports this year. The major Asian markets of Japan (up 36 percent for the year) and South Korea (up 48 percent) are currently the third and fourth largest markets and either or both could overtake Mexico as the largest export market by the end of the year. Canada has already exceeded Mexico as the number one market for the year to date. Together Japan and South Korea represent 30.8 percent of total exports, slightly lower than the North American share of 35.7 percent for Mexico and Canada combined. However, when the smaller Asian markets of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Vietnam are added to Japan and South Korea, the total Asian market share of U.S. beef exports is 44.5 percent for the year to date. The fact that the bulk of U.S. beef exports is distributed fairly equally across four major markets (Mexico, Canada, Japan and South Korea) along with several growing smaller markets is very healthy for the industry. Exports to different countries represent different cuts and qualities of beef and thus provide the best chance for the market to maximize carcass value across diverse domestic and international markets. Moreover, a robust set of exports markets reduces the inevitable risk associated with export dependence as the role of exports markets continues to grow.

Can we expect beef exports to continue growing at the same pace in 2012? Probably not, mostly because it is very difficult to maintain double-digit growth rates for long periods of time. However, the growth is based on strong fundamental market demand in the various countries and that demand is likely to continue growing albeit at perhaps a somewhat slower rate in the next couple of years. U.S. beef provides a specific set of characteristics and a unique type and quality of meat that has few competitors in global markets. Continued political success in broader access to markets is also a key component to future beef export growth. Recent announcements that Japan may ease age restrictions to meat from animals 30 months and younger should help maintain growth in that market in 2012. Longer term, access to mainland China would provide enormous market potential over time if not immediately. U.S. dollar exchange rates play an important role, especially in the short run with a weak dollar continuing to favor U.S. beef in export markets. The weakness of the U.S. dollar, especially relative to the Australian and Canadian dollars is perhaps more important to beef trade than is the more typical comparison of the dollar to the Euro. A strengthening of the U.S. dollar would likely moderate exports in the short run but does not change the underlying demand strength in global beef

markets. U.S. beef exports will likely grow as a share of domestic production in the coming years, partly because of continued growth in exports, perhaps more moderately than the last two years, but also because of falling U.S. beef production.

## Can Wheat Pasture Be Used for Pregnant Heifers?

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Last week's rain showers give some Oklahoma producers hope that wheat pasture may be available in late November or early December. Wheat pasture (if adequate rainfall produces growth) can be used as a supplement for pregnant replacement heifers. Using wheat pasture judiciously makes sense for pregnant heifers for two reasons. Pregnant heifers consuming full feed of wheat pasture will gain at about 3 pounds per head per day. If they are on the wheat too long, the heifers can become very fat and cause calving difficulty. Also the wheat pasture can be used for gain of stocker cattle or weaned replacement heifers more efficiently.

In the early 1990's, a [two year study](#) was conducted with bred replacement heifers on three different wintering diets. Group 1 was placed on wheat pasture full time from the first week of December until the first week of February. Group 2 heifers were given access to a self-feeder with a growing ration that was developed to mimic the growth of the wheat pasture heifers. Group 3 heifers were wintered on native range and fed 3 pounds per day of 40% protein cube. At the beginning of calving (February 7) and until spring all heifers were on native range and fed the 40% protein supplement.

Birth weights (wheat heifers = 75.2 pounds; self fed heifers = 78.3 pounds; and native range heifers = 76.3 pounds) were similar for all groups of heifers. In the first year, when nearly half of the wheat heifers were in a [body condition score of 7](#), more calf loss was noted in this group. Some heifers were noted to experience apparent uterine fatigue, a condition where during labor the heifer strains for a short time then gives up. If wheat pasture is used for bred heifers, use it as a protein supplement by allowing the heifers access to the wheat pasture on at least alternate days. Some producers report that 1 day on wheat pasture and two days on native or bermuda will work better. This encourages the heifers to go rustle in the warm season pasture for the second day, rather than just stand by the gate waiting to be turned back in to the wheat. It is important to note that an adequate amount of standing forage or dry hay must be available during the "off" days. Whatever method is used to grow the pregnant replacement heifers, plan to have them in good body condition ([BCS = 6](#)) by calving so that they will grow into fully-developed productive cows.

# Just Another Day in Oklahoma

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Many Oklahomans have marveled at the weather we have experienced in 2011. On February 11, a record low of minus 33 degrees was recorded in Northeast Oklahoma; and in the summer 117 degrees was noted in Southwest Oklahoma. The difference is only 150 degrees. But that was 6 months apart!

Last Monday morning, November 7 (during the most severe drought in Oklahoma history) I left home to go in to the office about 7 am. There was very dense fog. I can barely see the car in front of me. I hear on the radio that a cold front was approaching and there would be snow in the panhandle. The day was partly cloudy and then sunny. It became quite warm for November (highs near 80 degrees).

In the late afternoon I began watching TV and soon severe thunderstorms were being reported in Southwest Oklahoma. Of course that meant that tornadoes were about appear and sure enough by four o'clock several tornadoes were on the ground and the "supercell" that the storm chasers were following was headed in our direction. As the severe thunderstorm arrived, the straight line winds were being reported at 80 miles per hour. The tornado warning was issued! Of course, the obligatory hail was now pounding the skylights on the upstairs living room. Just as the National Weather Service Radio sounded its alarm to tell us that we are now in a Flash Flood Warning (please re-read earlier sentence about "severe drought"), the living room and the chair in which I was sitting began to shake with a 4.7 Richter scale earthquake.

Just another day in Oklahoma. Wish you here!

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