

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Winter Challenges for Oklahoma Cattle Producers

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The unexpected and welcome rain in November and early December has been followed across much of Oklahoma with the warm and dry conditions that the weather folks anticipated for this winter. Recent weather across the U.S. has generally been more consistent with La Niña weather patterns with storms streaming across the northern part of the country and little moisture in the south central and southwestern regions. Though soil moisture conditions are better than this time last year, the next two months will be critical in determining what sort of spring forage conditions will develop. A continuation of the current warm and dry conditions plus the typical winds this time of year would lead to early spring conditions that could be just as bad as last year for forage emergence.

In the meantime, cattle producers will continue operating with minimal hay supplies trying to get through the winter. USDA's December 1 estimates of hay stocks in Oklahoma were down 38 percent from a year earlier confirming that we have been using the enormous quantities of imported hay as fast as it has arrived in the state. Cattle producers have continuing challenges to manage the nutritional status of cows as we approach the spring calving season. Cows will particularly vulnerable to poor reproductive performance if body condition drops significantly after calving.

Cattle prices are starting the year strong; well above year ago levels for most all classes of cattle. There are reports of very strong cow and heifer markets in northern regions although the market in the Southern Plains is still waiting to see what the drought situation is before committing to heifer retention more aggressively. The situation is very uncertain at this time and

producers have to be prepared to rebuild if drought conditions improve or to initiate the next round of liquidation if the drought continues into the spring. By April, Oklahoma cattle producers could be either strong buyers of cows and heifers or big sellers of cows. In the meantime, limited water supplies, hay and supplement feeding, growing fire danger and the threat of cattle and hay rustling provide plenty of management challenges for Oklahoma cattle producers.

Prepare Before You Pull (that difficult birth)

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Before applying the obstetrical chains to "pull" a calf during a difficult birth, a proper analysis of the situation must be made. Wash the vulva, anus and the area in between using soap and warm water. Pulling on a calf should only be done when the presentation and posture of the calf are normal. Normal is defined as the "anterior presentation" with fore feet first, head resting on the limbs, and the eyes level with the knees. A backwards calf can be delivered only when both back limbs are presented. Before chains are applied, **be certain that the cervix is completely dilated.**

To properly use obstetrical chains when assisting with a difficult birth, follow the this procedure. To attach the chain, loop it around the thin part of the leg above the fetlock. Then, make a half hitch and tighten it below the joint and above the foot. Make certain that the chain is positioned in such a manner that it goes over the top of the toes. In this way the pressure is applied so as to pull the sharp points of the calves hooves away from the soft tissue of the vaginal wall.

Obtain a copy of *"Calving Time Management of Beef Cows and Heifers"* E-1006, an OSU Extension Circular that thoroughly discusses working with cows and heifers before and during calving season. It can be downloaded from:

<http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-5171/E-1006web.pdf>

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