

# **COW/CALF CORNER**

## **The Newsletter**

**From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service**

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

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Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Specialist

## **The Numbers are In: Part 1**

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

As expected, the Cattle report issued last week by USDA confirmed that the U.S. beef cattle industry got smaller last year. The inventory of all cattle and calves on January 1, 2012 was 90.77 million head, the smallest inventory since 1952. The inventory of beef cows was 29.88 million head, the smallest since 1962 and the 2011 calf crop was 35.31 million head, the smallest since 1950. The estimated feeder supply on January 1 was 25.85 million head, down 1.06 million head or 3.9 percent from a year earlier.

The report also confirms the unprecedented impact of the 2011 drought in the Southern Plains which lead to the overall decrease in cattle inventories. Oklahoma experienced a decrease of 288,000 beef cows, down 14.3 percent in one year. This was by far the biggest decrease in Oklahoma as the result of a drought. The only bigger decrease occurred in 1976 as beef cow numbers fell from the all time record levels after a brief spike. Texas experienced a similar 13.1 percent decrease in beef cow numbers. In absolute terms this loss of 660,000 cows in Texas is the largest one year decline on record. Texas cattle inventories were down 10.5 percent while in Oklahoma the inventory of all cattle and calves was down 11.8 percent. New Mexico also experienced drought with all cattle and calves down 9.7 percent and beef cows down 10.9 percent. Decreased cattle and cow numbers were also noted for Louisiana, Arkansas and Kansas.

The regional variation in this report was perhaps the most interesting component of the numbers. While the report confirms the impact of the drought in the Southern Plains, it also confirms the expansion in other states. Large increases in major cattle states were noted with

beef cows in Iowa up 6.5 percent; Nebraska up 6.3 percent and Idaho up 5.2 percent. Some of this increase was due to relocation of cows from drought impacted regions and some was due to internal herd expansion.

The beef replacement heifer numbers indicated similar differences in regional impacts and intentions. Sharp decreases in replacement heifers in Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Missouri were offset by sharp increases in Nebraska, Iowa, Wyoming and Colorado. Overall, the one percent increase nationally in beef replacement heifers was the biggest surprise in the report relative to analysts' expectations.

Overall, the report confirms the dramatic regional differences in outcomes regarding cattle numbers in 2011. The next newsletter will look at what the report suggests about the possibilities for the beef cattle industry in 2012.

## **Help Baby Calves Start Breathing**

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Specialist

All baby calves are born with some degree of respiratory acidosis. Respiratory acidosis is the buildup of by-products of carbon dioxide and a deficiency of oxygen. As the calf passes through the birth canal, it undergoes this buildup of carbon dioxide and its metabolites, and a deficiency of oxygen. When any baby calf is first born, it will gasp for air and pant for a few minutes in an effort to correct the carbon dioxide/oxygen unbalance in the circulatory system.

Therefore, when a calf is completely delivered, primary attention is directed toward establishing respiration. Mucus and fetal fluids should be removed from the nose and mouth by cleaning these air pathways with your fingers and thumbs. These actions are important for any calf that is assisted during the "calving" process, but they are critical for those calves that come backwards. The common practice of suspending the calf for an extended time by its hindlegs to "clear the lungs", must be questioned. Most of the fluids that drain from the mouth of these calves probably come from the stomach, and the weight of the intestines on the diaphragm makes expansion of the lungs difficult, if not impossible.

Respiration is stimulated by many factors, but only ventilation of the lungs, allow us to render help immediately. The phrenic nerve can be stimulated with a sharp tap on the chest slightly above and behind where the heartbeat can be felt. Brisk rubbing of the skin (if the calf has not had frost bite) can be helpful in stimulating circulation and breathing activity. Perhaps the most effective and simple approach to stimulating the first breathing activity is by tickling inside of the nostril with a stiff piece of straw. The vigorous tickling stimulation of the nostrils will cause the diaphragm of the calf to have a noticeable reflex. As the calf snorts and coughs in reaction to the straw stimulation, the lungs expand and air is taken in. Many ranchers report that this is a very effective way to get a baby calf started on the necessary process of rapid breathing.

Baby calves that are delivered unassisted, but were subjected to a very long stage 2 of delivery, may be deprived of oxygen long enough to cause some brain damage. This is often the cause of the “dummy” calf that seems to be unalert and unwilling to nurse without assistance.

Always know your own limitations. If you find a calving situation that you cannot solve yourself in a short time, contact a large animal veterinarian as soon as possible. With the record high prices of calves in 2012, saving every calf is more important than ever.

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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