COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

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What a Difference a Couple of Weeks Makes

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Recent weather and the calendar ensure that spring will happen in a significant part of the drought region in the Southern Plains. Unusually warm temperatures, additional rain, and the approach of April have changed the prospects for much of eastern Oklahoma and eastern Texas. Soils are saturated in much of the region and green up is occurring rapidly. Cool season forages are virtually assured early forage and hay production. Warm season forages need a little more time but the prospects look favorable at this time.

These changes are reflected in the latest Drought Monitor map, which shows continued improvement in the region. Even more dramatic are the changes in the latest Drought Outlook from the Climate Prediction Center. The Drought Outlook for the next three months shows significant drought easing in much of central and eastern Oklahoma and eastern Texas with some improvement in a band just west of this area. However, my recent travels across the Texas Panhandle and New Mexico confirm that drought conditions remain very severe in these regions farther west.

Producers in the improved area can begin planning for recovery. The first consideration should be to understand the condition of pastures and develop a management plan for forage recovery. Introduced forages likely have the ability to recover faster with moisture and adequate fertilization. Native range pastures, which may have been more heavily damaged by the drought will, in any event, require longer grazing deferment and careful management to recover.

Additionally, producers who partially or totally destocked during the drought can begin thinking about the timing and the type of animals for rebuilding. Producers, for whom stockers is an alternative, should evaluate using stockers initially even if cow-calf production is the ultimate goal. Stockers may provide more flexibility to adjust stocking rate and grazing duration to fit limited forage situations. Stocker heifers provide flexibility to retain for breeding or sell if grazing and hay resources are insufficient to retain all of the heifers. There are many possibilities for drought recovery and producers should consider the condition of forage resources, financial implications of restocking, market conditions, and tax implications among other factors. Most importantly, producers should recognize that, in many cases, the forage, financial and market conditions all suggest that recovery from the 2011 will be a multi-year process that requires a carefully considered plan.

How Long is the Interval from

Calving to Return to Heat Cycles in 2 year-olds?

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Research data sets have shown conclusively that young cows that calve in thin body condition but regain weight and condition going into the breeding season do not rebreed at the same rate as those that calve in good condition and maintain that condition into the breeding season. The following table from Missouri researchers illustrates the number of days between calving to the return to heat cycles depending on body condition at calving and body condition change after calving. The data was compiled using two-year old Angus first-calf heifers.

Table 1. *Predicted number of days from calving to first heat cycle as affected by body condition score at calving and body condition score change after calving in young beef cows. (Body condition score scale: 1 = emaciated; 9 = obese)*

	Condition score change after calving to day 90						
Condition score at calving (below)	**-1**	**-0.5**	**0**	**+0.5**	**+1**	**+1.5**	**+2**
3	189	173	160	150	143	139	139
4	161	145	131	121	115	**111**	111
5	133	116	103	93	86	83	82
5.5	118	**102**	89	79	72	69	66

Adapted from Lalman, et al. 1997. Journ. of Animal Science. 75:2003.

This data clearly points out that young cows that calve in thin body condition (BCS=3 or 4) cannot gain enough body condition after calving to return to heat cycles as quickly as cows that calve in moderate body condition (BCS = 5.5) and maintain or lose only a slight amount of condition. Pay particular attention to the heifers that calved in a body condition score of 4 and then were fed enough of a high energy diet to gain 1.5 condition scores by day 90. Compare them with heifers that calved in a body condition score of 5.5 but lost a half score and were 5.0 at 90 days. The heifers that calved in poor body condition and were fed well did not return to estrus as quickly (111 days vs. 102 days) as the heifers that were in good body condition and lost a small amount of body condition after calving. It is very difficult to add body condition on young lactating cows in most range situations. Cows must be rebred by 85 days after calving to

calve again at the same time next year. Notice that none of the averages for two-year old cows that calved in thin body condition were recycling in time to maintain a 12 month calving interval. This illustrates why many ranches breed the yearling heifers 2 to 3 weeks ahead of the start of the breeding season for adult cows. It gives these heifers extra days to return to heat cycles and therefore breed at about the same time as the other cows in the herd.