

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Oklahoma Rain Raises Wheat Pasture Prospects

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

Much of Oklahoma has received some rain the past ten days, with a broad swath of the state receiving significant rain this past weekend. Recent rain totals vary from less than one inch up to about three inches. Moisture combined with cooler temperatures (and cooler soil temperatures) has wheat producers thinking about planting wheat for grazing. While conditions are developing favorably at this time, additional timely moisture will be needed to make wheat pasture a reality. Nevertheless, some wheat planting could begin in the next couple of weeks.

Market conditions for winter grazing appear to be favorable as well, though producers may need to consider stocker enterprises that are somewhat different than the traditional stocker system. Historically, there is a strong preference for very lightweight stockers in Oklahoma, with many stocker calves purchased in the 375-500 pound range. With typical winter gains, this often results in feeders marketed in late February or early March at weights ranging from 675 to 750 pounds. This system worked well in the past and, in fact was often the most economical stocker alternative. Cattle markets have changed dramatically and may make this system much less attractive if not infeasible this year.

The 2012 drought reduced feeder prices this summer with impacts expected to continue until next summer due to high grain prices. Lightweight calf and stocker prices dropped sharply through July but have bounced back strongly in the past two weeks. Four-weight steer prices in Oklahoma have increased about \$15/cwt. since the end of July. Heavy feeder prices dropped less than calves but have recovered only about \$4/cwt. in the past month.

The result is a feeder price pattern that has again developed the increasingly familiar bent shape reflecting sharp price decreases from calves to middle weight feeders then small price decreases from middle weights to heavy feeders. This past week, Oklahoma steer prices indicated a \$39/cwt. price decrease from 425 pounds to 625 pounds but only a \$3.50/cwt. price decrease from 625 pounds to 825 pounds. This feeder price pattern is consistent with the small feeder

inventories that keep calf prices high combined with high grain prices that force a high value of gain and encourage more weight on feeders prior to feedlot placement.

If the current price patterns persist, the traditional four-weight steer has a very low value of gain for the first two hundred pounds of gain that is only partially overcome if the animal is grown to heavy feeder weight. By contrast, a heavier beginning weight of 575 to 625 pounds has a value of gain well over a dollar a pound from the beginning of stocker production. With typical winter gains, these animals will be marketed from 800 to 850 pounds in the spring.

The prospect of winter grazing will likely increase demand for lightweight stockers with prices remaining strong or going higher. At the same time, high feedlot cost of gain and the likelihood of continued cattle feeding losses means that upward price potential for middle and heavy weight feeders is limited. It is possible that feedlot cost of gain could get high enough to cause feeder prices to invert with the lowest prices likely for middleweight feeders (roughly 600 pounds) and higher prices for lightweight and heavyweight feeders. The current cattle market conditions open up more stocker production possibilities in terms of a wider range of beginning weights and heavier ending weights. It is important for stocker producers to explore an expanded array of stocker production possibilities in light of these very dynamic market conditions.

Forage Testing -- A Key Decision Aide in 2012

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Oklahoma producers find themselves out of their "comfort zone" as they go into the winter of 2012. Many have inadequate forage supplies. Therefore, if they were fortunate to find another source of hay to purchase, they may have forage of unknown quality and nutritive value.

Forage analysis can be a useful tool to remove some of the mystery concerning the hay that producers will feed this winter. The high cost of protein and energy supplements are further fuel to this advice. Testing the grass hays this year for protein and energy content will help the producer design winter supplementation programs most appropriate for the forage supply that is available. It is hard to think of any year when forage testing was more important.

There are several good methods of sampling hay for forage analysis. Most nutritionists would prefer to use a mechanical coring probe made specifically for this purpose. The coring probe is usually a stainless steel tube with a serrated, cutting edge. It is 1 inch in diameter and is designed to fit on a 1/2 inch drill or brace. Cordless drills make these tools quite mobile so that the hay bales to be tested do not have to be hauled to be near an electrical outlet. The hay samples are placed in paper or plastic bags for transfer to a forage testing laboratory. Cores are taken from several bales at random to obtain a representative sample to be analyzed.

Grab samples can also be obtained and tested. To receive the best information, grab several samples by hand from about 6 inches into the open side of the bale or the middle third of a round bale. Place all of the sample in the bag. Do not discard weeds or stems, just because they look undesirable. They are still part of the hay that you are offering to the livestock. Be certain to label the forage samples accurately and immediately, in order for the laboratory analysis to be

correctly assigned to the proper hay piles or bales. Obviously the more samples that are sent to the laboratory for analysis, the more information can be gained. Just as obvious is the fact that as the number of samples increase, the cost of forage testing increases. Any of the potential nitrate accumulating hays should be tested for nitrate concentration.

Samples can be taken to the [OSU County Extension office](#) near you and then sent to the [OSU Soil, Water, and Forage Testing laboratory](#) in Agricultural Hall on the campus at Stillwater. The price list below gives some of the options from which producers may choose to best fit their situation. There are other commercial laboratories available that also do an excellent job of forage analysis.

[Forage Analysis Price list from OSU Soil, Water, and Forage Testing Laboratory](#)

Basic Analysis	Protein and Moisture	\$6.00
Basic Plus Energy	Protein and Moisture, ADF, TDN, Net Energy for: Gain, Lactation, Maintenance	\$12.00
Basic Plus Energy Plus Relative Feed Value (RFV)	Protein, Moisture, ADF, TDN and Energy NDF - Neutral Detergent Fiber RFV - Relative Feed Value (Alfalfa Only)	\$18.00
Nitrate Content	Nitrate and Moisture	\$6.00

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