

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Wheat Pasture Production and Economic Prospects

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

Much of Oklahoma has received significant rain in the past week that is particularly timely for winter wheat pasture prospects. The rains occurred in some of the driest areas of the state including the south west and south central regions. However, the northern tier counties received little rain and remain very dry. In all cases the rain does not solve the underlying drought conditions and additional moisture will be needed soon for continued wheat development. USDA-NASS reported last week that 21 percent of the Oklahoma wheat crop was

planted, up sharply from this time last year (and from a week earlier) but just equal to the five year average for this date.

A significant portion of wheat pasture may be used to support cows this winter, much as it did last year. Many cow-calf producers are short of pasture and hay for the winter. Limit grazing wheat pasture combined with limit feeding hay is a good way to stretch hay supplies and minimize expensive supplemental feed needs. Although more labor is required for this type of feeding program, it may be a good investment relative to hay and supplement feed costs.

Wheat pasture also has good value for stocker production. In the past month, the sharp price break against lightweight animals has moderated somewhat, though the market still favors heavier beginning stocker weights, especially for dual purpose winter grazing programs that will terminate in late February or early March. For forage only programs that will graze out wheat until May, the additional weight at the end offsets somewhat lower value of gain on the initial animal gains. The current levels of both March and May Feeder futures is sufficient to lock in values of gain that range from \$1.10 to \$1.35/pound. These values suggest that winter grazing will cover a \$150-\$170/head grazing bill and other typical production costs and still return \$70-\$90/head to the cattle. For the four-weight steers, the net return may be in the \$20-\$35/head range for winter-only grazing. However, a light steer grazing out wheat until mid-May may have a wheat pasture bill of \$285-\$310/head but still has the potential to generate \$70-100/head of net return over all production costs.

Using Wheat Pasture as a Winter Supplement for Cows

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Last winter many Oklahoma cow calf producers utilized wheat pasture as a mainstay in the winter nutrition program for the cow herd. Assuming more fall rainfall comes to the Southern Plains, wheat pasture will again be a key source of protein and some energy for many cow herds in this part of the United States. If that rainfall occurs, grazing of wheat usually will start in late November or early December.

Limited grazing of wheat pasture has proven to be the best and also more efficient approach for utilizing this high-quality forage with mature beef cows. The protein requirements of a dry cow can be met by allowing her to graze on wheat pasture for one day and returning her to dry pasture grass or hay for 2 - 3 days. A pattern of one day on wheat and 1 day off, should meet the protein needs of the same cow after calving. Producers must be reminded that adequate forage

must be available in the dry grass pastures or in the form of hay to provide much of the energy needs of the cows in the “off” days.

The day on wheat pasture should be defined as that amount of time required for the cow to graze her fill of wheat forage (3 - 5 hours) and not a full 24 hours. This short time on wheat allows the cow to gather adequate amounts of protein to carry her over the ensuing days on dry grass or hay. A 3 - 5 hour grazing limit helps to avoid the unnecessary loss of valuable forage due to trampling, bedding down and manure deposits. Under normal weather conditions in the fall, enough wheat forage should be accumulated by early December to supply the protein needs of about 1 to 1.5 cows per acre throughout the winter months when limit grazing is practiced.

Producers who decide to use continuous grazing programs, should watch out for the possibility of "grass tetany." Grass tetany will normally strike when older cows are grazing small grain pastures in the early spring and the danger will tend to subside as hot weather arrives. A mineral deficient condition primarily due to calcium, and to a lesser degree to magnesium, is thought to be the major factor that triggers the disorder and normally affects older cows that are nursing calves under two to three months of age. Dry cows are seldom affected.

When conditions for occurrence of tetany are suspected, cows should be provided mineral mixes containing 12 to 15 percent magnesium and be consumed at 3 to 4 ounces per day. It is best for the supplements to be started a couple of months ahead of the period of tetany danger so that proper intake can be established. Because tetany can also occur when calcium is low, calcium supplementation should also be included. Symptoms of tetany from deficiencies of both minerals are indistinguishable without blood tests and the treatment consists of intravenous injections of calcium and magnesium gluconate, which supplies both minerals.

Cows grazing lush small grain pastures should be fed mineral mixes containing both calcium and magnesium.

Mark Your Calendars

Megan Rolf, Oklahoma State University Beef Extension Specialist

Next year marks a hallmark event in Oklahoma. Oklahoma State University, in collaboration with the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF), will be hosting the 45th Annual Beef Improvement Federation Research Symposium and Meeting. The last time the BIF convention was held in Oklahoma was March, 1981, when the meeting was held in Stillwater.

BIF is an organization dedicated to coordinating all segments of the beef industry, from researchers and producers to retailers, in an effort to improve efficiency, profitability, and sustainability of beef production. BIF was initiated almost 70 years ago to encourage the use of objective measurements to evaluate beef cattle. Continuing the tradition, BIF is now the clearing house for developing standardized programs and methodology for recording of performance data for all traits from birth weights to carcass traits. Their three leaf clover logo symbolizes the link between industry, extension and research.

The 2013 BIF convention will be held in Oklahoma City from June 12-15, 2013, at the Renaissance Hotel and Convention Center. It will be a forum bringing together industry professionals, producers, and researchers to discuss current issues facing the beef industry. The schedule boasts an interesting array of speakers, socials, and tours that promise to be exciting and informative. Special features include a night out at the National Western Heritage Museum and Cowboy Hall of Fame featuring live music and museum tours for the guests. We are anticipating a large turnout and hope that all of you will be there to help represent the rich history and spirit of Oklahoma beef production.

More information on the convention will be posted at a later date on the BIF website (www.beefimprovement.org) and through the new genetics and genomics extension portal on the Oklahoma State extension website (http://beefextension.com/new%20site%202/Genetics/OSUGenetics_Home_design_NewFiles.html). We will send another announcement when registration is open and keep you updated on any new developments. We hope to see you there!

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