

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

April 8, 2013

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More Beef Herd Liquidation in 2013?

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

Drought conditions in parts of the Plains have improved modestly since the beginning of the year. Some improvement has occurred in South Dakota, Kansas and Oklahoma. Additionally,

the latest drought outlook from the Climate Prediction Center continues to push the line for potential drought improvement farther west. Though this raises hopes for drought moderation, the fact is that much of the Central Plains is still in serious drought and very vulnerable to worsening drought conditions. The next two to three months are critical to determine the forage prospects for the remainder of the year.

Meantime, there are indications that the prolonged winter weather may be causing additional herd liquidation at the current time. Beef cow slaughter, after decreasing almost ten percent in the first eight weeks of the year, is up 6.8 percent in the last two weeks compared to year ago levels for the same period. This brings the year to date total to a meager 6 percent decrease compared to 2012. A decline in beef cow slaughter of more than double this rate would be required to suggest herd stabilization. There may be several factors contributing to accelerated herd liquidation in recent weeks. Extended cold weather may have pushed some producers, especially in the central and northern plains, beyond their exhausted hay supplies with no alternative but to sell additional animals.

In the Southern Plains, I am hearing some anecdotal stories of cows that are showing up without a calf. With drained forage supplies, producers would likely cull these cows immediately. The idea that two years of drought stress may be showing up as reduced reproductive performance in cows this spring is not at all surprising. This, combined with recent storms that may have added to calf death loss, may further reduce an already small 2013 calf crop.

All of this begs the question of what the situation is regarding replacement heifers. The modest increase in replacement heifers on January 1, 2013 may, like 2012, turn into a very low rate of placement of heifers into herd. Or it could be that producers are sacrificing cows in the face of limited forage supplies but holding onto heifers to replace them. What is happening now and what happens between now and June will likely determine the overall herd inventory for the remainder of the year. After seven years of continuous liquidation which occurred as part of herd liquidation 15 of the last 17 years, the question of whether the beef cow herd is liquidating or stabilizing in 2013 has significant implications for several years.

Unfortunately, there will be no data to answer these questions until 2014. USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) has decided to eliminate the July Cattle report. Thus, the industry will have no indication of what is happening with cow liquidation, heifer retention or the size of the calf crop until early next year. There is much uncertainty about additional drought impacts this year on top of everything the beef industry has been through in recent years. The formidable challenges of minimizing expected decreases in beef production; maintaining feedlot and packing infrastructure; and rebuilding the cow herd all depend on having timely information

on cow herd inventory changes and feeder supplies. I can't think of a worse year in two or three decades to not have the mid-year inventory information available.

Make Plans for Cow/Calf Boot Camp

Dave Sparks, DVM, Oklahoma State University Area Food Animal Quality and Health Specialist

Are you an experienced beef producer who would like to increase the management and profitability of your operation but can't go back to school to do so? Are you a newcomer to the industry trying to figure out if this business is right for you? If you answered yes to either question OSU Extension may have the answer for you. This spring the 4th OSU Cow/Calf Boot Camp will be held on April 22, 23, and 24, 2013, in Tishomingo.

This 3 day school is open to the first 50 to enroll. These 50 students will work with approximately 20 OSU extension specialists, animal scientists, and veterinarians in a variety of teaching formats. These include hands on workshops with live cattle, production management slide shows, small group table exercises, a ranch visit, and a pasture tour.

Topics to be covered in the three days and evenings include industry overview, cattle handling and working techniques, hay evaluation, internal and external parasite management, efficient reproduction, bull selection, calving season and cow efficiency, marketing, calving management, cattle health and vaccination programs, cow nutrition, farm business planning, Oklahoma Quality Beef Network, mortality disposal, facilities and fencing, selecting replacement heifers, culling management, aging cows by dentition, pregnancy testing options, pasture management, and weed and brush control. In addition, graduates will be certified as Beef Quality Assurance producers by the Oklahoma Beef Council.

The three day school will consist of a minimum of 30 hours of programs. In addition, students will be given time to meet and network with the other producers in attendance. Lunch on all three days and dinner on Monday and Tuesday will be provided as will continental breakfasts and refreshments for breaks. A fee of \$100 per enrollee will be charged to cover the costs of food and printed materials.

What have former attendees thought of the opportunity? Here are a few quotes from earlier students: “Had such a good time—will be soaking up and sharing information for quite some time. Feel more confident in what we can do to be a successful cow-calf operation. And hopefully grow into a more successful business. Thank you, all involved!!” ; “....level of knowledge increased 10 fold, thank you for all your assistance.”; “All management principles need implementing on my property. I was doing some things right and surviving, now I think I can make a real difference in my operation and grow a successful product.”

If you would like more information visit osucowcamp.okstate.edu or call 918-686-7800 or 580-332-7011. Remember enrollment is limited so don't be left out. We hope to see you there.

Proper Injection Sites to Remember at Calf-working Time

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

The months of April and May are traditionally the months when “spring round-ups” take place. This is the time that large and small cow/calf operations schedule the “working” of the calves. As the majority of the spring calves reach their second month of life, it is time to castrate the male calves and immunize all of the calves to protect them against blackleg. Also relatively new research suggests that in some situations, calves may be vaccinated for the respiratory diseases, i.e. IBR and BVD.

Correct administration of any injection is a critical control point in beef production and animal health. There is a negative relationship between meat tenderness and injection sites, including injection sites that have no visible lesion. In fact, all intramuscular (IM) injections, regardless of the product injected, create permanent damage regardless of the age of the animal at the time of injection. Tenderness is reduced in a three-inch area surrounding the injection site. **Moving the injection-site area to the neck stops damage to expensive steak cuts.** Therefore, cow/calf producers should make certain that their family members, and other hired labor are sufficiently trained as to the proper location of the injections before the spring calf-working begins.

Give injections according to label instructions. Subcutaneous (SQ) means under the skin, intramuscular (IM) means in the muscle. Some vaccines (according to the label instructions) allow the choice between intramuscular (IM) and subcutaneous (SQ). **Always use subcutaneous (SQ) as the method of administration when permitted by the product's label.** Remember to “tent” the skin for SQ injections unless instructed otherwise by the manufacturer.

Beef producers are encouraged to learn and practice Beef Quality Assurance Guidelines. You can learn more about the Oklahoma Beef Quality Assurance program by going to the website: <http://oklahomabeefquality.com/> The Oklahoma Beef Quality Assurance Manual can be downloaded from that site.

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