

# **COW/CALF CORNER**

The Newsletter

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In this Issue:

## **Cattle Markets Move Past Summer Lows**

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

## **Helping Fall-calving Cows and Heifers During the Calving Process**

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## **Cattle Markets Move Past Summer Lows**

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Cattle markets and boxed beef appear to have moved past the summer lows. Wholesale beef, fed cattle and feeder cattle markets are all generally moving in the same direction, rare for this year, and certainly not all in harmony yet. The Choice boxed beef cutout has increased about \$8/cwt. in the past two weeks. The beef demand index for the second quarter showed a continued slow improvement in beef demand year over year. Stronger beef exports have also helped beef values this summer. Domestic beef demand remains a concern this fall as wholesale values are expected to push back to record levels on sharply lower beef production in the fourth quarter.

Fed cattle have traded sideways most of the summer but have finally shown indications of moving higher. Fed price improvement has been limited so far and will likely remain limited as feedlot supplies will remain relatively large through September based on large placements of heavy feeders earlier. Fed prices will likely continue a slow grind higher through the third quarter. Decreased placements and fewer lightweight placements since May will lead to sharply falling feedlot supplies in the fourth quarter which should help push fed prices into the upper \$120s by year end.

Feeder cattle markets have been on a nearly three month run after spring weakness halted with lows in May. Feeder prices have been helped by significant improvement in forage conditions in many areas and ever stronger prospects for sharply lower corn prices in the next crop year. Although feeder cattle prices are sharply higher for all weights, heavy feeder prices have increased relatively more than calf and stocker prices thus far. However, heavy feeders are more likely to stabilize in the coming weeks while stocker and calf prices may continue to advance some into the early fall. Falling feedlot cost of gain and good prospects for winter grazing will provide additional demand for stocker calves this fall. Renewed heifer retention is likely this fall that will further squeeze feeder supplies into 2014.

# Helping Fall-calving Cows and Heifers During the Calving Process

Dr. Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Professor-Emeritus

Fall calving season is (or soon will be) upon the Oklahoma ranches that have fall and winter calving. An issue facing the rancher at calving-time, is the amount of time heifers or cows are allowed to be in labor before assistance is given. Traditional text books, fact sheets and magazine articles stated that "Stage II" of labor lasted from 2 to 4 hours. "Stage II" is defined as that portion of the birthing process from the first appearance of the water bag until the baby calf is delivered. Research data from Oklahoma State University and the USDA experiment station at Miles City, Montana clearly show that Stage II is much shorter, lasting approximately an hour in first calf heifers, and a half hour in mature cows.

Table 1. Research Results of Length of Stage II of Parturition

Location of Study	No. of Animals	Length of Stage II
USDA (Montana) *	24 mature cows	22.5 min.
USDA (Montana) *	32 first calf heifers	54.1 min
Oklahoma State Univ. **	32 first calf heifers	55.0 min

\*Doornbos, et al. 1984. Journ. of Anim. Science: 59:1

\*\*Putnam, et al. 1985. Therio: 24:385

In these studies, heifers that were in stage II of labor much more than one hour or cows that were in stage II much more than 30 minutes definitely needed assistance. Research information also shows that calves from prolonged deliveries are weaker and more disease prone, even if born alive. In addition, cows or heifers with prolonged deliveries return to heat later and are less likely to be bred for the next calf crop. Consequently a good rule of thumb: If the heifer is NOT making significant progress 1 hour after the water bag or feet appear, examine the heifer to see if you can provide assistance. Mature cows should be watched for only 30 minutes before a rectal examine is conducted. If you cannot safely deliver the calf yourself at this time, call your local veterinarian immediately. Before applying chains and beginning to pull, make CERTAIN that the cervix is fully dilated.

Most ranches develop heifers fully, and use calving ease bulls to prevent calving difficulties. However, a few difficult births are going to occur each calving season. Using the concept of evening feeding to get more heifers calving in daylight, and giving assistance early will save a few more calves, and result in healthier more productive two-year-old cows to rebreed for next year. For more information on topics concerning assisting cows and heifers at calving time, download and read an Oklahoma State University circular E-1006 "Calving Time Management For Beef Cows and Heifers". This free publication can be downloaded from this website: <http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-5171/E-1006web.pdf>

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