COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter
From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
October 28, 2013

In this Issue:

Replacement Heifer Demand is Impacting the Feeder Heifer Market

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

There are indications that heifer retention is increasing this fall, although definitive data are not yet available. The delayed October Cattle on Feed report, due out October 31, is expected to show a deeper decrease in heifers on feed. Heifers on feed dropped sharply in the last half of 2012 then increased relatively in the first half of 2013. By July of this year, heifers on feed were still down year over year, but down only 3.5 percent compared to a 9.5 percent decrease on January 1, 2013. It appeared that more heifers entered feedlots in the first half of the year. This is further indicated by the fact that heifer slaughter has been higher by 2.7 percent since July after being down 3.7 percent, year over year, in the first half of the year. This bulge in heifer slaughter should be nearly finished and decreasing heifer slaughter is expected for the remainder of the year.

Meanwhile, auction market reports indicate that replacement heifer demand is picking up. A partial check of auction reports from around the country for the last week indicates at least ten markets where replacement heifers are noted in the feeder heifer auction summaries. The majority of these reports are in Nebraska and South Dakota but also in several other states as well. Heifers denoted as replacements are bringing significantly higher prices than uncommented feeder heifers of the same weight and class. The replacement heifers are priced with small discounts to comparable steers or even higher prices in a few instances. Based on Oklahoma City auction prices, 525 pound heifers (Med/Large #1) have been discounted to steers an average of 11.6 percent over the period 2008-2012. So far in 2013, the discount has average a little larger at 12.8 percent. In several specific cases last week, the replacement heifers were

discounted only 2-4 percent from comparable steers, with some examples of heifers priced higher than steers.

In what is likely a hint of much more to come, the October 24, 2013 auction summary for Valentine, Nebraska is the most dramatic current example of breeding versus feeder demand for heifers. The summary includes several sets of four-weight to six-weight heifers selling as replacements. Several lots sold on a per hundredweight basis but denoted as replacements and several lots sold on a per head basis, bringing even higher prices. For example, heifers (Med/Large #1), ranging from 521 to 567 pounds, sold from $169.27/cwt. to $173.60 as feeder heifers but sold at $185/cwt as replacements or by the head for $1197.75 (527 pounds), which is equivalent to $227.28/cwt; and $1274.38 (564 pounds), i.e., $225.95/cwt. By contrast, steers ranging from 519 to 574 pounds sold from $192.24 to $205.76/cwt. Of the five-weight heifers in this summary, 45 percent sold as replacements, with only 55 percent selling as feeder heifers. I expect to see more of this range of heifer values, if not this fall, certainly next spring as long as forage conditions look promising.

I suspect that market reporters will have increasing difficulty accounting for the differences in feeder heifer and breeding heifer values. In addition to the "Replacement" comment (used when it is clear that heifers are being purchased for breeding), the "Fancy" label, which is applied to both steers and heifers of known superior quality, is likely, in the case of heifers, to increasingly represent breeding demand as market reporters attempt to account for price differences in heifers. I expect the overall discount of heifers to steers of the same weight to be smaller on average for the next couple of years if herd expansion is indeed underway.

Are You Getting Your Money's Worth?

Dave Sparks DVM, Oklahoma State University Area Extension Veterinarian

Do you suffer from sticker shock when you order or pick up the vaccines for your herd health program? Unfortunately, there is not much you can do to lower these costs without putting your animals' health at risk, but you can do some things to ensure that you are getting your money's worth of protection.

The first thing to consider is that not all animals are created equal when it comes to their ability to mount an immune response. It would be nice if animals had a gauge, like a fuel gauge, that would read their level of immunity following vaccination so you could tell who was protected and who wasn't. The fact is you can't tell by looking so you must optimize your management to maximize the immune response. Animals that are on a poor plane of nutrition, especially for protein, copper, and zinc, cannot respond well to the vaccines you use. Very young and very old animals cannot respond strongly. Animals that are suffering from other health problems or that are convalescing are not able to respond well to your vaccination program. Stressed animals are limited in their ability to respond immunologically, so letting hauled or shipped cattle rest for several days before vaccinating and handling cattle quietly to minimize stress will pay big dividends when it comes to response to your vaccines.

Most biological products need to be stored under refrigerated conditions. It is not good enough to assume that placing them in a refrigerator accomplishes this. A recent study showed that the majority of refrigerators used to store vaccines were not cold enough or even worse, were too cold and froze the products. If you don't have a refrigerator thermometer in your refrigerator get one and use it. The labels will tell you what is the optimum temperature for storage. Nothing is worse than to think you are protecting your animals with high priced vaccines, only to be unknowingly shooting blanks. If your vaccine supplier doesn't have a refrigerator thermometer in his refrigerator, ask him to get one.

When cattle working day arrives, continue to care for your vaccines. A small ice chest with frozen cold packs will keep the products cool in the summer and safe from freezing in the winter. Many biological products come with two portions to be mixed when you get ready to use them. The manufacturer knows what he is doing and there is a reason for this. Once they are mixed, they start gradually losing effectiveness. Never mix up more than you can use in 30 minutes for maximum immunological response.

A common question is "can I still use products that have gone out of date?" While it is true that the manufacturer may be conservative when applying an expiration date, you can't evaluate the efficacy by any other means. You may not be providing the protection you need. When dated products go out of date, throw them away. Minimize waste by purchasing products that have a long date, only purchase what you expect to use by that date, and maintain good inventory management of products and their expiration dates.

Herd health programs are like insurance. Every producer needs one, but all producers don't need the same coverage. Your local veterinarian will know what problems he or she is seeing in your area and what products are most likely to reduce the incidence of these problems. Make your local vet your partner in designing a program tailored to fit your needs. You can't afford to be without the protection you need, but you also can't afford to pay for protection that you don't need.

Animal health products should represent a significant portion of your production costs, so make sure you are providing the management needed to maximize the response to these products. An old adage among stockmen is that you "can't starve a profit out of them!" High priced feed, however, can't contribute to a profit if you leave it in the barn. Herd health products can't help you be profitable if you don't use them in a manner to maximize their effectiveness.

Mineral Feeding Can Reduce the Risk of Grass Tetany Next Spring

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Much of Oklahoma and the Southern Plains will have wheat pasture to utilize as winter feed for stocker cattle, replacement heifers, and in some cases for adult cows. At, and after calving time next January, February, and March "grass tetany" could occur in a few situations.

Grass tetany, caused by magnesium deficiency does not seem to be a major problem in Oklahoma although occasional cases are reported. It typically occurs in beef cows during early lactation and is more prevalent in older cows. The reason is thought to be that older cows are less able to mobilize magnesium reserves from the bones than are younger cows. Grass tetany most frequently occurs when cattle are grazing lush immature grasses or small grains pastures and tends to be more prevalent during periods of cloudy weather. Symptoms include incoordination, salivation, excitability (aggressive behavior towards humans) and, in final stages, tetany, convulsions and death.

It is known that factors other than simply the magnesium content of the forage can increase the probability of grass tetany. High levels of potassium in forages can decrease absorption of magnesium and most lush, immature forages are high in potassium. High levels of nitrogen fertilization have also been shown to increase the incidence of tetany although feeding protein supplements has not. Other factors such as the presence of certain organic acids in tetany-causing forages have been linked with tetany. It is likely that a combination of factors, all related to characteristics of lush forage are involved.

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. Learn more about mineral nutrition of grazing cattle by downloading and reading the Oklahoma State University Extension Circular E-861 Vitamin and Mineral Nutrition of Grazing Cattle.