

# **COW/CALF CORNER**

The Newsletter

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## **Oklahoma Quality Beef Network Sales and Wheat Pasture Stocker Demand**

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The first few of several Oklahoma Quality Beef Network (OQBN) sales have been held in the past two weeks. OQBN is a vac-45 type preconditioning programming with a specific protocol for health and weaning of calves. Several mores sales are upcoming in McAlester (November 19); Blackwell (November 23); Tulsa (December 2); El Reno (December 4); and Pawnee (December 7). Last week, at the OKC West sale at El Reno, Oklahoma, OQBN steers and heifers sold for premiums ranging from \$11 to \$24/cwt. compared to non-preconditioned feeders. The value of preconditioning is apparent even when feeder cattle prices are near record levels. For stocker or feedlot buyers, the improved health and reduced death loss risk of preconditioned feeder cattle is even more important at high prices.

Wheat pasture is continuing to develop and calf markets in the Southern Plains reflect strong wheat pasture demand for stockers. The strong demand for lightweight stockers is maintaining a sharp price rollback on initial stocker gains. In last week's seven-market Oklahoma auction averages, the steer price rollback for the 425-525 pound weight range was \$21.61/cwt; for 525-625 pounds, \$16.75/cwt.; for 625-725 pounds, \$3.07/cwt.; and for 725-825 pounds, \$5.87/cwt. This means that the value of gain is heavily loaded towards the later stocker gains, i.e., in animals above 600 pounds. Stocker producers should determine a target end weight that captures this higher value of gain and works backwards, considering production conditions and time available for weight gain, to determine the best purchase weight for stockers. For example, at current prices, a 550 pound beginning stocker weight has a 46 percent higher value of gain on 200 pounds of gain, compared to a 450 pound beginning weight.

Steers versus heifers may be another important consideration for stocker producers. In the last three weeks, an increasing number of feeder auction reports from several states have included heifers sold as replacements at significantly higher prices than feeder heifers. In many cases, the

replacement heifers are selling \$8-\$12/cwt above comparable feeder heifers. This implies heifers selling at 5 to 6 percent discount to comparable steers, compared to the more typical 11 to 12 percent heifer discount. In several instances, replacement heifers are selling at prices at or above comparable steer prices. For the most part, replacement heifer demand this fall is centered in the central and northern Plains and the western Corn Belt. However, replacement heifer demand is likely to spread into the Southern Plains, where much herd rebuilding is ahead, if drought conditions continue to moderate.

## How Much Hay Will a Cow Consume?

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Estimating forage usage by cows is an important part of the task of calculating winter feed needs. Hay or standing forage intake must be estimated in order to make the calculations. Forage quality will be a determining factor in the amount of forage consumed. Higher quality forages contain larger concentrations of important nutrients so animals consuming these forages should be more likely to meet their nutrient needs from the forages. Also **cows can consume a larger quantity of higher quality forages.**

Higher quality forages are fermented more rapidly in the rumen leaving a void that the animal can re-fill with additional forage. Consequently, forage intake increases. For example, low quality forages (below about 6% crude protein) will be consumed at about 1.5% of body weight (on a dry matter basis) per day. Higher quality grass hays (above 8% crude protein) may be consumed at about 2.0% of body weight. Excellent forages, such as good alfalfa, silages, or green pasture may be consumed at the rate of 2.5% dry matter of body weight per day. The combination of increased nutrient content AND increased forage intake makes high quality forage very valuable to the animal and the producer. With these intake estimates, now producers can calculate the estimated amounts of hay that need to be available.

Using an example of 1200 pound pregnant spring-calving cows, lets assume that the grass hay quality is good and tested 8% crude protein. Cows will voluntarily consume 2.0% of body weight or 24 pounds per day. The 24 pounds is based on 100% dry matter. Grass hays will often be 7 to 10% moisture. If we assume that the hay is 92% dry matter or 8% moisture, then the cows will consume about 26 pounds per day on an "as-fed basis". Unfortunately we also have to consider hay wastage when feeding big round bales. Hay wastage is difficult to estimate, but generally has been found to be from 6% to 20% (or more). For this example, lets assume 15% hay wastage. This means that approximately 30 pounds of grass hay must be hauled to the pasture for each cow each day that hay is expected to be the primary ingredient in the diet.

Thank you Veterans. We appreciate your sacrifice and service to our country!

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