

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Cattle Markets Take a Holiday Breather

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

Feeder cattle markets, after an impressive counter-seasonal run this fall, appear to be taking a bit of a break before Thanksgiving. Feeder markets are holding mostly steady with slight gains still noted for lightweight stockers. Some winter grazing demand continues in Oklahoma but highly variable weather which includes cold temperatures and wet conditions has made receiving cattle and maintaining cattle health a challenge the past week or so. The replacement heifer demand that has been very impressive the past month seems to be mostly done for now. I expect breeding female demand to pick again next spring assuming forage conditions look favorable at that time. Fed cattle prices have dropped back slightly from record levels but are holding close in the \$130-\$131/cwt level. Choice boxed beef prices dropped back \$2-\$3/cwt this past week to the \$199/cwt. level. I expect cattle and beef markets to move mostly sideways for the remainder of the year though boxed beef could rebound slightly in early December. Continued decreases in cattle slaughter and beef production through the end of the year will help support prices near current levels for fed and feeder cattle.

The November Cattle on Feed report included October placements up 9.8 percent from last year's record low levels. Some perspective is important to interpret this report. October placements were down 1 percent from the five-year average that include last year and were down 5.3 percent from the 2007-2011 five-year average. The latest October placement number was slightly smaller than the 2002 level and, with the exception of last year, was the smallest October placement since 1995. By any measure except last year's record low level, it is still a small October placement number. Seasonally, October is the largest placement month as feedlot inventories grow in the fall to a seasonal peak in December before declining to seasonal lows in August. The November 1 cattle on feed inventory was 10.607 million head, down 5.7 percent from one year ago and is the lowest November 1 feedlot inventory since 1996.

Beef Quality Assurance for Cow Operators

Dave Sparks, DVM, Oklahoma State University Area Extension Veterinarian

Much has been said about Beef Quality Assurance in recent years, but how many of us really know what it is and why it is important to all beef producers? Simply put, BQA is the effort to instruct beef producers, and their workers, as to ways that they can produce a high quality and wholesome product that keeps the consumer coming back for more.

While great strides have been made with fed cattle, cow operators have a ways to go. In feedlots a few people are handling large numbers of cattle, and feedback from the processor is fairly

simple. In cow country, many more people are handling smaller numbers of cattle, and the feedback, while real, is not so obvious. Injection site lesions in the sirloin are one measure of the care with which cattle are processed and medicated. From 1995 to 1999 the feedlot industry reduced these lesions from 12% of fed carcasses to less than 2%. At the end of this time period, however, over 40% of all cow and bull carcasses had lesions in the sirloin. Too often cow operators see the cow as a calf production unit rather than a part of the food chain. The fact is, about ¼ of the beef consumed in our country comes from cull cows and bulls and it is not all hamburger. Today, the better cuts such as the round, sirloin, loin, and rib-eye allow the packers to pay better cow prices than we have seen in years past. Cull cows represent about ¼ of the gross income for most cow operators. If we, as an industry, could reduce the annual carcass losses due to bruising, injection lesions, excess fat trim, and condemnation due to drug residues, what would be your part of the extra ½ billion dollars on the table? Cow buyers are aware of what this waste costs, and they know which herds, areas, and sales most of the problems come from. When your culls come through the ring you need as many hands in the air as possible. Proper techniques when handling and processing cattle can go a long way. Use the smallest needle that will do the job and change it at least every 10 head. Dull needles cause more lesions, and a needle that fatigues and breaks off is a serious problem. While injection site lesions are trimmed away when found, they make the whole cut of meat tougher due to extra connective tissue deposited in the muscle. Be sure to give all injections in front of the shoulder, and when you have a choice, give injections subcutaneously. Reduce bruising by eliminating overcrowding and make sure loading facilities are safe and cattle flow through them easily. Market cull cows before lameness and eye problems get severe, or barren cows get overly fat. Proper drug and vaccine usage can be summed up with 5 words, “Read the label,” and “Keep records.” Drug residue problems result when dosage, course of treatment, or route of administration are not according to the label, or specified withdrawal time before slaughter is not adhered to. According to law, all violations are the responsibility of the producer, so if you have a problem not only are the future prices you receive affected, but you will be subject to possible fines and/or quarantine. If you do have a violation and you can produce proper treatment records, officials are likely to work with you to help identify and solve the problem. Without records, they may well resort to sterner measures. As Americans we have the safest and most wholesome meat in the world, but we need to constantly work to keep it that way. Beef is still “What’s for Dinner” today, but we need to make sure it’s on the menu tomorrow too.

Observe Bulls Closely as the Fall Breeding Season Begins

By Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist
The week of Thanksgiving is traditionally a time of thanks and turning in the bulls. Cow calf operations with fall-calving herds that target a late August, early September beginning to the calving season will put the bulls with the fall-calving cows now. A good manager keeps an eye on his bulls during the breeding season to make sure that they are getting the cows bred. Occasionally a bull that has passed a breeding soundness exam may have difficulty serving cows in heat, especially after heavy service. Bulls that cannot physically inseminate cows or bulls with very low libido (desire to mate) can be detected if observed closely. Such problems can best be detected by observing bulls while they work. **Therefore producers should (if at all possible) watch bulls breed cows during the first part of each**

breeding season. If problems are apparent, the bull can be replaced while salvaging the remainder of the breeding season and next year's calf crop. Likewise a small proportion of bulls can wear out from heavy service and lose interest. These, too, will need to be replaced. The greater the number of cows allotted to each bull in the breeding pasture the more critical it is that every bull be ready to work every day of the breeding season.

Injuries to bulls during the breeding season are relatively common. When a bull becomes lame or incapable of breeding, because of an injury to his reproductive tract, he needs to be removed from the breeding pasture and replaced with another bull.

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