

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

December 23, 2013

In this Issue:

Less Cattle on Feed; Strong Feeder Prices to End 2013

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

Breeding Heifers on Wheat Pasture

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Just How Do Santa's Reindeer Get the Job Done?

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Less Cattle on Feed; Strong Feeder Prices to End 2013

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

With most auctions closed the next two weeks, last week's combined Oklahoma auction summary was the final report for the year. Calf prices finished the year with the strong tone that has prevailed all fall. Steers under 500 pounds were priced at \$212/cwt and higher, up 31 percent from lows in June and about 19 percent higher than one year ago. Seven-weight feeder steers were in the low \$160/cwt. last week, up 23 percent from May lows and 11 percent higher than this time last year. Feeder cattle prices are expected to average 11-13 percent higher in 2014 compared to 2013. Feeder cattle supplies will continue to tighten in 2014 if forage conditions favor accelerated heifer retention and herd expansion.

The December Cattle on Feed (COF) report indicated that November placements were 96.9 percent of year earlier levels; smaller than the average pre-report estimate but within the wide range of estimates. Marketings were 95.5 percent of last year, with one less business day in the month compared to last year. The December 1 on-feed total was 94.5 percent of last year at 10.725 million head, the smallest December feedlot inventory since 1996.

The COF report also confirms regional changes in feedlot production. December feedlot inventories were down more, year over year, in the Southern Plains compared to the Midwest. Feedlot inventories in Iowa were 100 percent of last year with Nebraska at 96 percent of one year ago, while Texas and Kansas inventories were 93 and 94 percent of last year. Oklahoma, in particular, has seen a sharp drop in feedlot inventories in 2013. The December 1 Oklahoma feedlot inventory was 77 percent of year ago levels. Oklahoma

placements, January through November, were down 9.6 percent while marketings were down only 1.4 percent leading to the reduced current inventory and smaller future marketings. December 1 feedlot inventories in Texas and Oklahoma represented less than 26 percent of the total U.S. feedlot inventory for the first time since the current cattle on feed data series began in 1996.

Reduced feedlot production in the Southern Plains no doubt reflects the dramatic herd reductions in the region due to drought since 2010 but may also reflect longer term changes in cattle feeding competitiveness compared to the Midwest. It was noted in 2007 that generally higher grain prices combined with increased availability of by-product feeds in the Corn Belt would shift cattle feeding competitiveness somewhat to the Midwest relative to the Southern Plains. It is difficult to separate long term trends from short term market impacts but time will tell.

Breeding Heifers on Wheat Pasture

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Many areas of the Eastern two-thirds of Oklahoma have grown some wheat pasture for use as winter feed. Some producers may have questions about the utilization of wheat pasture for growing replacement heifers before, during, and after their first breeding season. Unsatisfactory breeding performance has occasionally been anecdotally reported when replacement heifers have been exposed to bulls or AI while grazing wheat forages. Therefore an Oklahoma State University study was conducted to compare reproductive performance of heifers grazing wheat pasture before, and during breeding, with heifers grazing wheat pasture until approximately 3 weeks before breeding.

In each of two years, 40 spring born Angus and Angus crossbred heifers were placed on wheat pasture in December and randomly assigned to one of two treatment groups in mid March. Group one (Wheat Pasture; n=20) remained on wheat pasture (mean crude protein = 26.6 %) through estrus synchronization and fixed-time AI. Group two (Dry Lot; n=20) was placed in drylot and had free choice access to a corn-based growing ration (11.1% crude protein) through estrus synchronization and fixed time AI. The heifers were inseminated on about April 5 both years. Heifers were exposed to fertile bulls starting 10 days after fixed time AI for 45 more days. Fixed time AI conception was determined at 32 days after AI by ultrasonography.

The percentage of heifers cycling at the start of estrous synchronization was 75% and 55% for Wheat Pasture and Dry Lot, respectively. Weights of Dry Lot heifers were slightly heavier than Wheat Pasture heifers (897 vs. 867 pounds) at the time of AI but were similar at ultrasound (917 vs. 910 pounds). Conception rate to Fixed time AI was similar for Wheat Pasture (54%) and Dry Lot (43%) and final pregnancy rate was similar for Wheat Pasture (98%) and Dry Lot (88%). Reproductive performance of heifers grazing wheat pasture during estrus synchronization and Fixed time AI was similar to heifers consuming a corn-based growing diet. Source: Bryant and co-workers. 2011. February issue. The Professional Animal Scientist.

Just How Do Santa's Reindeer Get the Job Done?

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist



Have you ever wondered how Santa's reindeer can make that monumental journey on Christmas Eve? Let's look into some key facts about reindeer that may help us understand how they get Ole St. Nick on his appointed rounds over the world.

First of all, historians report that reindeer have been domesticated by humans for over 5000 years. Since Santa himself is no spring chicken, we can assume that they have worked together for quite awhile. They should not have any trouble finding their way around. There is no need to worry about them getting lost.

We do know that reindeer are ruminants. They are like cattle in this regard. They have four compartments to their stomach. Of course Santa gets them filled up with hay and moss before he leaves the North Pole, so they should have plenty of feed stored in the four compartments to make it all around the globe. Also, cattle nutritionists have known for years that hay digests more slowly than grain, therefore the big meal that the reindeer eat before the journey should last even longer. Or just like your mom says "It'll stick to their ribs!"

As for drinking water that should be no problem whatsoever. In their homeland the water is all frozen so they are used to getting the moisture they need by eating snow. So as the sleigh is parked on snowy rooftops in cold weather cities, the reindeer can take on the moisture they need if they get thirsty.

How do they keep warm while flying around on Christmas Eve? The reindeer coat is made of two layers; an outer layer of bristles and an inner layer of dense fur. The fur that they have is very thick and can hold a lot of air. The "blanket" of insulation combining fur and air helps keep them warm in even the coldest of climates. Plus flying around Christmas night in many areas of the world that are warmer than they have at home should not be a problem.

How do they fly? Well that's a tougher question, but let's look at what we do know about them. Reindeer are amazingly fast runners on the ground. University of Alaska researchers report that a newborn baby reindeer at one day of age can out run the fastest graduate student. By the time

that they are fully grown it is hard to tell what speeds that they could reach. Next remember those huge antlers. Antlers of adult male reindeer can be as much as 4 feet long! Just think about it. Each reindeer has 2 sets; that's 8 feet of antlers and with eight reindeer, or nine, if we count Rudolph on foggy nights, that is 64 to 72 feet of total antler span. A typical small Cessna airplane only has about 36 feet of wingspan. Certainly it seems feasible those eight reindeer running that fast with all that antler span could get off the ground.

There are a couple of myths about reindeer that we should clear up. You have probably heard the poem that says that they have tiny reindeer feet. Actually they have a very wide large hoof that they use at home to dig through the snow to find grass and moss to eat. You've got to think that those wide hooves would come in handy for sliding to rather sudden stops on the small landing sites that Santa has to work with on Christmas Eve.

And you've probably heard the song about "up on the house top click, click, click". Well it is true that reindeer do make a clicking sound as they walk. They have a tendon that snaps over a bone joint and makes a clicking sound on every step.

These are just a few facts about Santa's Reindeer. Maybe this will help us understand that age-old mystery that occurs every Christmas Eve.

Merry Christmas to all and we'll visit with you the first week of January 2014 to again talk about beef cattle in the Cow Calf Corner.

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This includes but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services. References within this publication to any specific commercial product, process, or service by trade name, trademark, service mark, manufacturer, or otherwise does not constitute or imply endorsement by Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service.