

# **COW/CALF CORNER**

The Newsletter

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In this Issue:

## **February Adjustments in Cattle and Beef Prices and Margins**

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

## **Assisting the Posterior Presentation (Backwards Calf)**

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## **February Adjustments in Cattle and Beef Prices and Margins**

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After the wild January ride, cattle and beef markets are settling into somewhat more stable and realistic levels moving forward. A barrage of winter storms has affected consumption and distribution of beef as well as feedlot production. For the year to date, beef production is down 8.6 percent with cattle slaughter down 9 percent. As a result, margins continue to adjust with relative winners and losers among the various beef industry sectors. Wholesale boxed beef cutout had the wildest ride with Choice cutout spiking up to \$240/cwt., up 20 percent from the beginning of the year, and retreating to current levels under \$208/cwt. Packers benefitted only partially from the short-lived price increase because the values represented a limited spot market for wholesale beef and many packers had a significant portion of their beef production forward priced at lower values. The concurrent increase in fed cattle prices has squeezed packer margins because the higher fed prices are being paid on all cattle but only a portion of the boxed beef was sold at the high spot prices. Subsequently packer margins have been further squeezed as boxed beef prices have fallen more than fed cattle prices.

The relative winner in all this is the fed cattle market, where prices have retained more than half of the January gains. Fed prices were about \$135/cwt. the first week of January and have dropped to current levels of \$142/cwt. after peaking at \$150/cwt. about three weeks ago. Feedlots are very current at this time as the combination of high prices and winter weather have conspired to pull cattle forward and limit slaughter-ready supplies. Feedlot breakevens are at current market price levels or higher in many cases so the current situation may be one of limiting losses more than profitability but it is still well above earlier expectations for the market

at this time. A series of winter storms continues to pummel the northern half of the country and winter weather impacts on fed cattle performance will continue for some time.

Feeder cattle markets did not, for the most part, participate in the January market roller coaster as feeder prices were already at high levels. However, the increase in fed cattle prices has made those feeder price levels more sustainable. Feeder cattle markets have been relatively quiet the past couple of weeks, staying mostly hunkered down through the severe weather that affected much of the country. However, feeder markets reawakened this past week with higher prices noted in many markets, though somewhat less in the Southern Plains. Replacement heifer demand continues strong in a growing part of the country. Cull cow and bull markets are strengthening seasonally with reduced supplies and strong hamburger markets. Breaking and Boning cows are pushing \$100/cwt. in many locations with slaughter bulls bringing \$110-120/cwt.

## Assisting the Posterior Presentation (Backwards Calf)

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Any cow calf producer that has spent several years in the cattle business has had the experience of assisting a cow or heifer deliver a calf that was coming backwards. Understanding the physiology and anatomy of the calf and mother will improve the likelihood of a successful outcome. Study the diagram of the “posterior presentation” shown below.



Note the relative positions of the tailhead of the baby calf and the umbilical cord that connects the calf to the mother's blood supply. As the calf's hips are pulled through the pelvic opening,

the baby calf's tail will reach the outer areas of the mother's vaginal opening. Once a person can see the baby calf's tailhead, the umbilical vessels are being compressed against the rim of the mother's pelvic bone. The blood flow, exchanging oxygen and carbon dioxide, between calf and mother is greatly impaired, if not completely clamped off.

Research, many years ago, conducted in Europe illustrates how little time it takes to compromise the calf's survivability when the umbilical cord is clamped. These scientists studied the impact of clamping the umbilical cord for 0, 4, 6, or 8 minutes.

**Table 1. Impact of clamping of umbilical vessels on calf survivability**

Duration of Clamping	Number of Calves	Fate of Calves
0 minutes	5 calves	All of the 5 calves lived
4 minutes	5 calves	4 lived; 1 died
6 minutes	3 calves	3 died
8 minutes	3 calves	3 died

Certainly, if a producer does not feel confident in their abilities to deliver the backward calf, call your veterinarian immediately. Time is of the essence. As producers examine heifers or cows at calving and find a situation where the calf is coming backward, they need to keep this European data in mind. If the calf's hips are not yet through the pelvic opening, they have a little time to locate help and have someone else to aid in the assistance process.

Once the cow and the producer in concert have pushed and pulled the calf's hips through the pelvic opening and the tailhead is apparent, the calf needs to be completely delivered as quickly as possible. The remainder of the delivery should go with less resistance as the hips are usually the toughest part to get through the pelvic opening. The shoulders may provide some resistance. However, some calf rotation and traction being applied as the cow strains will usually produce significant progress. Remember, the completion of the delivery is to be accomplished in about 4 minutes or less. The calf's head and nostrils are in the uterine fluids and cannot breathe until completely delivered. The calf must get oxygen rapidly to offset the hypoxia that it is been subjected to during the delivery. After the calf is delivered, clean the mouth and nostrils of fluids and tickle it's nostrils with a straw to cause snorting and inhalation of air to get it started to breathing.