

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

June 2, 2014

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Feeder markets continue red hot

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

Widespread rains over the Memorial weekend may have curtailed holiday activities but were enthusiastically welcomed by cattle producers in the Southern Plains. Much of the worst drought areas in eastern New Mexico, western Texas and western Oklahoma received rainfall that was very timely for forage production. USDA's Weekly Weather and Crop Bulletin reports that many locations across the region had 5-day rain totals that equaled 50 to 90 percent of year to date rainfall totals. Rains were heavy enough in some regions to provide runoff and some replenishment of critically low stock water supplies. Some areas missed out, with limited rain totals in northwest Oklahoma, southeast Colorado and southwest Kansas. Response to the rain was immediate with pastures greening up and forage growth starting by late last week. However, subsoil moisture is still critically low and follow-up moisture will be needed soon to sustain crop and forage growth. The recent rains are an encouraging start but there is still a long way to go for recovery in the region. Drought recovery heading into the heat of the summer is a challenging prospect at best.

Oklahoma auction totals were limited last week by the holiday weekend but feeder prices continued very strong. Four-weight, medium and large, number 1 steers were over \$250/cwt and all steers up to 700 pounds brought over \$200/cwt. Prices for heifers under 600 pounds appear to be discounted slightly less than usual for this time of year, while heavier heifer prices were discounted slightly more than the seasonal average. Demand for replacement heifers may have diminished slightly in the Southern Plains in recent weeks (though demand appears strong in the Northern Plains) but there has been a noticeable increase in prices for cow-calf pairs in Oklahoma in May.

It is likely that feeder prices are near the top seasonally, though continued improvement in forage conditions could sustain more stocker demand this summer. Although feeder prices are high

relative to feed prices, there is little reason to expect any significant weakness in feeder prices. Feedlots will face margin challenges with high feeder prices pushing up feedlot breakevens, despite prospects for continued moderate feed prices. However, tight feeder supplies combined with potentially expanding replacement heifer demand and stocker demand will keep feeder prices at or above record seasonal levels into the second half of the year.

Repeatability of calving difficulty

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Many producers are looking back through their calving books now to re-examine the most recent calving season and determine if improvements can be made between now and next spring. At a recent Oklahoma extension event, a cow/calf producer asked the time-honored question: “If a heifer has calving difficulty this year, what is the likelihood that she will have trouble again next year?”

A look back through the scientific literature sheds some light on this subject. Research conducted by Colorado State University and published in 1973 looked at parturition records of 2733 Hereford calves sired by 123 bulls and born to 778 cows/heifers. (Source: Brinks, et al. Journal of Animal Science 1973 Vol. 36 pp 11-17) .A repeatability estimate was obtained from heifers calving both as 2 year- and 3-year-olds. The estimate was 4.5%. Of 195 heifers which had no difficulty in calving at two years of age, 7.2% had difficulty as 3 year olds. Of the 77 two-year old heifers which experienced calving difficulty, 11.7% had difficulty again as 3-year-olds.

Heifers that experienced calving difficulty as 2 year-olds weaned 59% of calves born, whereas, those having no difficulty weaned 70% of calves born. Calving difficulty as 2 year-olds affected the number of calves weaned when 3 years of age and also the weaning weight of those calves. Heifers having calving difficulty as 2-year-olds weaned a 63% calf crop as 3-year-olds. Heifers having no difficulty as 2 years-olds weaned a 77% calf crop as three-year-olds.

From this research we learned that calving difficulty as a two-year-old has a profound effect on productivity. The likelihood that calving difficulty will happen again next year is only slightly greater than in heifer counterparts that calved unassisted this year.

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