

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Cow-calf production/marketing alternatives with limited forage

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Most all of Oklahoma received considerable rain from late May into early July. This resulted in much needed forage growth in all regions, including some of the worst drought areas. However, the heat of summer has arrived in July and forage growth has slowed abruptly. Rain now may do little to relieve continuing long term drought conditions and additional forage growth could be limited through the heat of summer. As a result, producers may face decisions about how to manage pastures and cattle to get through the summer. Many pastures, stressed from years of drought, require careful management to promote recovery and that may include limiting grazing this summer. Pastures need time to rebuild root systems and reproduce to reestablish pasture stands. Cow-calf producers have several management alternatives to reduce forage demand this summer.

Early weaning spring-born calves is an effective way to reduce the nutritional requirements of cows and thus forage demand. Early-weaned calves can either be sold now or retained in a backgrounding program. At this time, calves may be 150-200 pounds lighter than normal weaning weights. One alternative is to sell the calves now at significantly lighter weights than usual. This will result in lost revenue but, depending on the cost of feed for both calves and cows, may be the best option in some instances. Because of the steep premium for lightweight calves at the current time, the lost revenue is not as much as the weight might suggest. For example, using prices from last week in Oklahoma auctions, a 350 pound steer would bring about \$195/head less than a 500 pound steer or a reduction of about 15 percent of the animal value even though the weight is down 30 percent.

Alternatively, the value of added weight gain by retaining the calf in a backgrounding program is about \$1.40/lb (at current prices) for the additional pounds up to normal weaning weight. Confined, limit feeding of calves may be a viable alternative when stocker grazing is not available. Depending on the backgrounding cost of gain and the additional requirements, i.e. labor, etc, this may provide a potential return for retaining the calves and still provide the needed flexibility for pasture management. These two alternatives can be combined for more flexibility such as selling the heavy end of the calves and retaining the lighter weights in a backgrounding program or selling the steers and retaining the heifers for additional weight gain. It is possible that calf prices have peaked seasonally and prices could drop a bit this fall, especially if drought conditions redevelop. While the downside risk is low, having the calves weaned and in a backgrounding program, makes it easy for producers to monitor market conditions and market the calves at any time if any market weakness should develop.

Early weaning of calves should be followed immediately with early cow culling to further reduce forage demands. Pregnancy examinations and examinations of feet and teeth will help to identify cows that can be culled sooner rather than later. Average dressing Boning cow prices were record high at \$117-\$118/cwt. last week in Oklahoma meaning that a slaughter cow is worth roughly \$1500/head at the current time. With a bit of labor and extra management, there are several possibilities to take advantage of current calf and cow prices and simultaneously manage pastures for long term productivity.

Follow BQA guidelines when treating and selling cows

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Summer time often brings a few infectious ailments to beef cows. Common problems include eye infections and foot rot. Treatment of affected cows will often involve the use of antibiotics. On very rare occasions violative residues of pharmaceutical products have been found in carcass tissues of cull beef cows. Violations of drug residue regulations can result in expensive fines (or even worse, jail time) for the rancher and a “black-eye” for the entire beef industry. **It is vital that cow calf producers have a close working relationship with a large animal veterinarian in their area.** If a cow has an infection or disease that must be treated, her owner should closely follow the veterinarian's directions, and also read the label of the product used. Most of these medications will require that the producer keep the treated animal for the label-directed withdrawal time. The Oklahoma Beef Quality Assurance Manual contains the following discussion of medication withdrawal times.

"A withdrawal time may be indicated on the label of certain medications. This is the period of time that must pass between the last treatment and the time the animal will be slaughtered or milk used for human consumption. For example, if a medication with a 14-day withdrawal period was last given on August 1, the withdrawal would be completed on August 15 and that would be the earliest the animal could be harvested for human consumption. All federally approved drugs will include the required withdrawal time for that drug on the product label or package insert. These withdrawal times can range from zero to as many as 60 days or more. It is the producer's responsibility to be aware of withdrawal times of any drugs used in their operation. Unacceptable levels of drug residues detected in edible tissues collected at harvest

may result in traceback, quarantine, and potential fines or jail time. Substantial economic losses may result for the individual producer as well as negative publicity for the entire beef industry...”

Producers are responsible for residue problems and should follow these four rules:

1. If ever in doubt, rely on the veterinarian-client-patient relationship you have established with your veterinarian.
2. Use only medications approved for cattle and exactly as the label directs or as prescribed by your veterinarian.
3. Do not market animals for food until the withdrawal time listed on the label or as prescribed by the veterinarian has elapsed.
4. Keep well organized, detailed records of pharmaceutical products given to individually identified animals. Include in the record, the date of administration, route of administration, dosage given, lot or serial number of product given, person delivering the product, and label or prescription listing of withdrawal dates. Examples of Beef Quality Assurance records can be found in the Oklahoma Beef Quality Assurance Manual website at the menu item ["Record Keeping Forms"](#) . Records should be kept for 3 years after sale of the animal.

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