

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Forage conditions continue to improve in Oklahoma

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

More rain and moderate temperatures reignited forage growth in Oklahoma in the last half of July. After briefly stalling under hot, dry conditions in early July, timely rains the past two weeks have recharged surface soil moisture and contributed to improving subsoil moisture conditions. The majority of the state received between one and nearly 5 inches of rain in late July. Over the past 60 days, which captures most of the rain that began the third week of May, the entire state has received between 4 to nearly 17 inches of rain, which is 100 to 200 percent of normal for nearly all parts of the state.

According to the latest Drought Monitor, 60 percent of the state is in moderate or worse drought conditions (D2-D4), down only slightly from 65 percent in mid-May. However, the percent of the state in extreme or worse drought (D3-D4) is at 23 percent, down from 50 percent in mid-May and, of that, the area of exceptional drought (D4) is now less than 5 percent, down from 30 percent before the rain started in May. Waves of timely rain this summer combined with mostly moderate temperatures have allowed significant improvement of soil moisture conditions. Pasture and range conditions show similar improvement with the percent poor and very poor now at 19 percent compared to 44 percent in May. Currently 45 percent of state pastures are rated good or excellent compared to 22 percent in May. The percentage of pastures in fair condition is mostly unchanged since May.

Improved forage conditions present several cattle and forage management and marketing opportunities this fall. Abundant and high quality forage for the remainder of summer and into

fall should allow spring born calves to reach normal weaning weights and perhaps a bit more to take advantage of the value of extra calf weight gain. Normal seasonality of prices would imply that calf prices will decrease roughly seven percent between summer highs and October/November weaning. However, tight cattle supplies has trumped seasonal price patterns this year with price increases that have been stronger than seasonal in the first half of the year and may limit seasonal price pressure on calves this fall. The value of extra calf weight should remain strong through the fall.

Late summer moisture provides an opportunity to fertilize warm-season grasses such as Bermuda and stockpile high quality pasture that can reduce forage costs this fall and into winter. Though hay production should be good this summer, grazing is always significantly cheaper than feeding hay to cows and producers can use summer grazing management to extend grazing this fall and reduce hay costs. Depending on the quality, any extra hay that may be available this winter can provide flexibility to retain calves or replacement heifers, feed thin cull cows or be sold as a cash crop.

Winter wheat grazing will be very much on the minds of some wheat producers in about another month. The current surface and subsoil moisture conditions are encouraging. Unless August turns exceptionally hot and dry, it appears that decent conditions for wheat grazing may happen this fall. Adequate moisture and moderate soil temperatures in late August and early September are ideal for early establishment of wheat for grazing. Should it happen, stocker demand will support calf prices amid limited cattle supplies this fall.

Oklahoma Quality Beef Network fall sales

Gant Mourer, Oklahoma Beef Value Enhancement Specialist

Once again the Oklahoma Quality Beef Network (OQBN) is preparing for fall sales. Last winter proved to be challenge for many in the state due to lack of rain, but thankfully many parts of the state received starting in late spring and continuing through the summer. Pasture conditions are in good shape and we have only seen a handful of days over 100 degrees. At this point many producers are deciding how to market calves this fall. With the record high cattle prices the decision to precondition calves prior to shipping will be much harder for some. Many management options exist and even with increased prices those management options are still valuable to producers and may have more value than we think.

The Oklahoma Quality Beef Network (OQBN) is available to aid producers in making preconditioning decisions and capturing value of preconditioned calves when it becomes time to market. OQBN is a program, which began in 2001, and is a joint effort by Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES) and the Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association. At its core, OQBN provides improved communication among producers of all segments of the beef industry and allows for increased education while providing tools to improve access to value-added programs. One way in which this is done is through the OQBN Vac-45 health verification program. Cattle meeting the management requirements are verified through OCES and can be marketed as OQBN Vac-45 cattle. Once verified producers have the option but are not obligated to market cattle in a certified OQBN sale.

The program benefits both buyers and sellers in several ways, including reduced shrink, improved immune system, and weight gain during the weaning period increased market demands and feedlot performance. In addition to healthier, heavier calves when sold, sellers may earn higher prices per/cwt. In 2012, OQBN participants realized almost \$9/cwt premium over cattle that had no weaning or health history. Light weight calves realized a record high premium at over \$20/cwt. As cattle prices increase so does risk and buyers are willing to spend 60-70\$ more a head to decrease the risk of health problems on those calves.

The following is a list of several OQBN sales scheduled this fall across the state. For a producer to take advantage of these value-added opportunities, the cattle must be enrolled in the OQBN Vac-45 program, follow one of three health protocols, weaned by the deadline, and third party verified by extension personnel.

Location	Contact	Phone Number	Sale Date	Wean Date
Cherokee Livestock	Tim Starks	580-596-3361	October 29, 2014	September 14, 2014
McAlester Stockyards	Lindsey Grant	918-423-2834	November 4, 2014	September 20, 2014
OKC West	Bill Barnhart	800-778-9378	November 5, 2014	September 21, 2014
Elk City Livestock	Brandon Hickey	580-497-6095	November 7, 2014	September 23, 2014
Pawnee Livestock	Calvin Buchanan	918-852-5271	November 15, 2014	October 1, 2014
South Coffeyville	Jim Folk	918-255-6200	November 21, 2014	October 6, 2014
Blackwell Livestock	Gary or Grady Potter	580-363-9941	November 22, 2014	October 7, 2014
Tulsa Stockyards	Joe Don Eaves	918-760-1300	December 1, 2014	October 17, 2014
OKC West	Bill Barnhart	800-778-9378	December 3, 2014	October 19, 2014

For additional information or questions about the Oklahoma Quality Beef Network, contact your local OSU Extension Office or Gant Mourer, OQBN Coordinator at 405-744-6060 or at gantm@okstate.edu. Additional information may also be found at www.oqbn.okstate.edu

Growing bred replacement heifers

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

The strong cattle prices have encouraged more producers to develop replacement heifers to add to their current cow herd. Bred replacement heifers that will calve in January and February need to continue to grow and maintain body condition. Ideally, two year old heifers should be in a body condition score 6 at the time that their first calf is born. This allows them the best opportunity to provide adequate colostrum to the baby, repair the reproductive tract, return to heat cycles, rebreed on time for next year, and continue normal body growth. From now until calving time, the heifers will need to be gaining 1 to 1 1/2 pounds per head per day, assuming that they are in good body condition coming out of summer.

Heifers will need supplemental protein, if the major source of forage in the diet is bermudagrass or native pasture or grass hay. If the forage source is adequate in quantity and average in quality (6 - 9% crude protein), heifers will need about 2 pounds of a high protein (38 - 44% CP) supplement each day. This will probably need to be increased with higher quality hay (such as alfalfa) or additional energy feed (20% range cubes) as winter weather adds additional nutrient requirements. Soybean hulls or wheat midds may also be used to insure adequate energy intake of pregnant heifers.

Wheat pasture (if adequate rainfall produces growth) can be used as a supplement for pregnant replacement heifers. Using wheat pasture judiciously makes sense for pregnant heifers for two reasons. Pregnant heifers consuming full feed of wheat pasture will gain at about 3 pounds per head per day. If they are on the wheat too long the heifers can become very fat and may cause dystocia (calving difficulty). Also the wheat pasture can be used for gain of stocker cattle or weaned replacement heifers more efficiently. If wheat pasture is used for bred heifers, use it as a protein supplement by allowing the heifers access to the wheat pasture on at least alternate days. Some producers report that 1 day on wheat pasture and two days on native or bermuda will work better. This encourages the heifers to go rustle in the warm season pasture for the second day, rather than just stand by the gate waiting to be turned back in to the wheat. Whatever method is used to grow the pregnant replacement heifers, plan to have them in good body condition by calving so that they will grow into fully-developed productive cows.

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