

# COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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

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## **Fall forage conditions and cattle production**

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

The bulk of summer is past and forage conditions are improved for cattle production in many parts of the country. The latest pasture and range conditions indicate that overall range and pasture conditions in the U.S. are 20 percent poor and very poor compared to 31 percent last year and an average of 33.6 percent for this date from 2008 to 2012. Despite the difficulty of relieving drought in the summer, pasture and range conditions improved somewhat through the heat of summer; aided in part by a cooler than average summer. In the latest Drought Monitor, the percent of the U.S. that has no drought is 52 percent, the same as it was the week of May 20, 2014. However, the percent of the U.S. with D2-D4 (severe to exceptional) drought conditions was 21.6 percent compared to 28.3 in May. Marginal drought conditions remain in many regions but generally less severe compared to May. The exception to this general assessment is the far west including California, Nevada and parts of Oregon and Idaho where drought conditions continue very extreme. In fact, significant reduction in D3 and D4 drought conditions in much of the central and southern Plains was offset by increases in those categories in California and Nevada, thereby masking the improvement in the middle of the country in the Drought Monitor percentages.

Range and pasture conditions are improved with lower percentages of poor and very poor conditions in most all regions compared to this time last year. Despite the deteriorating conditions in the far west, the percent of pasture and range in poor and very poor condition in the 8 western states is 35.9 percent currently compared to 56.5 percent last year. The Great Plains region (including Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, and Wyoming) has 15.1 percent poor and very poor compared to 28.6 percent one year ago. The Southern Plains (Oklahoma and Texas) currently have 25.5 percent of pastures and ranges in poor or very poor condition compared to 33.5 percent last year. The eight states in the Corn Belt region have 13.4 percent poor and very poor condition, down from 26.3 percent from one year

ago. Only the southeast region has worse conditions compared to last year with 13.1 percent of pastures rated poor or very poor compared to 3.3 percent last year.

The August USDA Crop Production report included estimates for 2014 hay production. Alfalfa hay production is forecast to be up 10.5 percent from one year ago, with increases in both harvested acreage and estimated yield contributing to the increase. Other hay is forecast to be down 1.5 percent, with a 2.6 percent decrease in harvested acres and yield virtually unchanged from last year. Other hay production was likely decreased by early dry conditions in some regions that delayed hay harvest.

In the Southern Plains there are decent prospects for winter wheat grazing this fall and winter. Current soil moisture conditions are adequate but tenuous. Recent summer heat has resulted in dry topsoil conditions in some areas. My recent travels in western Oklahoma indicate that much of the wheat ground is ready for planting, with some just waiting for a rain. Wheat planted in early to mid September, will need timely follow-up moisture to continue growing.

Overall, it appears to me that some recovery of pasture, range and hay production has taken place in many regions. The process will need to continue for many months in some areas. There will likely be some fall stocker cattle demand in addition to strong feedlot demand for feeder cattle. Heifer retention is likely to accelerate this fall and herd rebuilding is likely beginning this year. The fact that heifer slaughter is down 8.6 percent for the year to date and beef cow slaughter is down 17.4 percent so far this year, are both indications of herd expansion. Generally better forage conditions will let the cattle industry begin to respond to market signals by doing what producers want to do rather than what Mother Nature is forcing them to do.

## **Reducing the risk of calf scours (Part 2)**

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Last week in the Cow Calf Corner Newsletter we examined management practices that would reduce the risk of calf diarrhea (scours) by reducing the exposure of the calf to the pathogens that could cause the disease. This week we will look at methods of increasing the immune status of the baby calf so that when the calf comes in contact with the pathogens, he will have a much better chance of fending off the disease entity.

### **Make certain that calf gets passive immunity.**

Baby calves are born without the presence of antibodies that fight disease organisms in the environment. They receive the antibodies via the first milk called colostrum that is provided (in most cases) by the mother. There are numerous factors that impact the success or failure of this passive transfer of immunity:

- 1) The amount of colostrum produced and available to the calf**

- a) First calf heifers must be in good body condition at calving to produce the maximum that they are genetically capable of producing. Calves born to thin heifers have been shown to have lowered levels of disease-fighting antibodies 24 hours after birth compared to calves born to heifers in good body condition (BCS=6).
- b) The calf must be vigorous enough to find the teat and nurse within a short time after birth.
- c) Calves that do not have access to good milking mothers need a commercial colostrum replacer or at least 2 quarts of properly thawed frozen colostrum from another cow.

2) **Calves need the colostrum (or replacer) within 6 hours of birth**

- a) Calves born after a long difficult delivery will often be sluggish and slow to get up. Plus they may have respiratory acidosis which will impair the ability of the calf to absorb the large proteins (antibodies or immunoglobulins). Use calving ease bulls to reduce the risk of dystocia and assist those calves that help in a timely manner.
- b) Feed sluggish calves the colostrum replacer or the natural colostrum from another source first. Do not feed them whole milk before the colostrum. Any milk product will speed up the process of intestinal closure (whereby the gut is losing its capability to absorb the large protein antibodies). Make certain colostrum or colostrum replacer is fed first. A second feeding of colostrum should follow within 12 hours of the first.
- c) When purchasing colostrum substitutes know the difference between a “replacer” and a “supplement”. A colostrum “replacer” should contain 100 g of immunoglobulin per dose and research has shown can replace a feeding of natural colostrum from a cow. The colostrum supplements will contain much less than 100 g of immunoglobulin and will be used to supplement a poor-milking mother’s colostrum. Remember to give the supplement after the calf has consumed the natural colostrum first.
- d) Timing is everything. Colostrum absorption by the intestine of the calf is declining rapidly after birth. Therefore it is critical that the baby calf receive a full dose of colostrum within the first 6 hours of life (the sooner the better).

If the management procedures discussed last week (reducing exposure to pathogens) and this week (increasing passive immunity in the calf) do not solve most of the scour problems on your operation, then visit with your local veterinarian about other options. One additional option to consider would be a pre-calving vaccine for the cows and pregnant heifers. This is given far enough before the calving season so that the colostrum in your cows will contain more antibodies designed to fight calf diarrhea organisms.

Calf diarrhea continues to be one of the most costly diseases in the beef industry. Losing a calf to scours is particularly painful at today’s weaned calf prices.

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