

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Oklahoma cattle market roundup

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Feeder cattle prices have increased this fall; showing no signs of seasonal weakness. Prices have advanced the most on 450-550 pound stockers, the most popular stocker animals for winter wheat grazing. Oklahoma auction prices for Medium and Large, Number 1 steers, 450-500 pounds averaged above \$300/cwt. for the first time ever the last week of October, pushing higher to \$307.02 this past week. Prices for 500-550 pound steers averaged \$296.62/cwt. last week and may push above \$300/cwt. this week. Rain in early October that established wheat was followed by a month of dry and warm conditions that threatened wheat pasture development. However, widespread rain across Oklahoma the first week of November ensures wheat pasture for the remainder of the year and has augmented stocker demand in November.

Stocker values of gain calculated on current prices have eroded slightly from the very strong levels that have existed since late summer. This is due to the proportionately bigger advance on stocker prices compared to heavy feeders the past couple of weeks. However, values of gain remain strong...well over a dollar per pound...and offer opportunity for returns this winter, especially as wheat pasture has gotten cheaper this fall. Values of gain are stronger for heavier beginning weights, i.e. animals over 600 pounds, perhaps providing an opportunity for producers anticipating a shorter winter grazing period.

The first few Oklahoma Quality Beef Network (OQBN) sales have been held and data on two of these sales confirm that buyers are paying strong premiums for the assurance that goes with certified preconditioned calves. Premiums over non-preconditioned calves have averaged \$25-\$30/cwt. in these early sales, with prices roughly 9-10 percent over market average prices. Buyers recognize that the risk of unknown health and nutritional status of ordinary calves

makes it worth paying a premium over record prices for more information about these stocker calves.

Cull cow prices have held relatively steady the past month, down from the August/September highs. Cull prices are holding near \$115/cwt., well above the spring highs and have shown relatively little seasonal weakness this fall. Beef cow slaughter continues well below year ago levels, down over 20 percent year over year in September and October. Breeding females have traded in a wide price range this fall in Oklahoma with good quality bred heifers and cows trading from \$2200 to over \$3000 per head. Prices have increased some since September. In October and early November, good quality young cow-calf pairs have traded from \$2500 to over \$3300 per head. Older and lower quality bred cows and pairs have traded under \$2000 per head, in some cases bringing no more than slaughter cow values. If forage conditions look good next spring, the price range for breeding females will likely narrow and strengthen from values this fall.

Using wheat pasture as a winter supplement for cows

Dr. Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Limited grazing of wheat pasture has proven to be the best and also more efficient approach for utilizing this high-quality forage with mature beef cows. The protein requirements of a dry cow can be met by allowing her to graze on wheat pasture for one day and returning her to dry pasture grass and/or hay for 2 - 3 days. A pattern of one day on wheat and 1 day off, should meet the protein needs of the same cow after calving.

The day on wheat pasture should be defined as that amount of time required for the cow to graze her fill of wheat forage (3 - 5 hours) and not a full 24 hours. This short time on wheat allows the cow to gather adequate amounts of protein to carry her over the ensuing days on dry grass or hay. A 3 - 5 hour grazing limit helps to avoid the unnecessary loss of valuable forage due to trampling, bedding down and manure deposits. Depending on planting date, under normal weather conditions in the fall, enough wheat forage should be accumulated by late November or early December to supply the protein needs of about 1 to 1.5 cows per acre throughout the winter months when limit grazing is practiced.

Producers who decide to use continuous grazing of small-grain pastures, should watch out for the possibility of "grass tetany." Grass tetany will normally strike when older cows are grazing small grain pastures in the early spring and the danger will tend to subside as hot weather arrives. A mineral deficient condition primarily due to calcium, and to a lesser degree to magnesium, is thought to be the major factor that triggers this disorder and normally affects older cows that are nursing calves under two to three months of age. Dry cows are seldom affected.

When conditions for occurrence of tetany are suspected, cows should be provided mineral mixes containing 12 to 15 percent magnesium and be consumed at 3 to 4 ounces per day. It is best for the supplements to be started a couple of months ahead of the period of tetany danger so that proper intake can be established. Because tetany can also occur when calcium is low, calcium supplementation should also be included. Symptoms of tetany from deficiencies of both

minerals are indistinguishable without blood tests and the treatment consists of intravenous injections of calcium and magnesium gluconate, which supplies both minerals.

Cows grazing lush small grain pastures should be fed mineral mixes containing both calcium and magnesium.

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