

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Federally Inspected Slaughter Summary

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

Data for federally inspected slaughter through November 1 indicates that total cattle slaughter was down 7.2 percent for the year to date compared to last year. Cattle slaughter in October dropped further, down 9.2 percent year over year. Decreased cattle slaughter and changes in slaughter composition have implications for beef production and provide indications about herd rebuilding.

Steer slaughter for the year to date is down 3.4 percent. Steer slaughter has decreased less than any other cattle class and has averaged 52.1 percent of total cattle slaughter so far this year, up from 50.1 percent of total slaughter last year. A higher proportion of steer slaughter, combined with larger steer carcass weights, has helped limit beef production decreases to an estimated 6.0 percent for the year to date. However, steer slaughter dropped sharply in October, down 6.9 percent from one year ago. The October year over year decrease in steer slaughter was larger than the decrease in heifer slaughter, with steers making up 50.4 percent of total cattle slaughter in October.

Heifer slaughter so far this year has decreased 8.7 percent, with heifers accounting for 28.2 percent of total cattle slaughter, down one half percent from last year. October heifer slaughter was down 6.3 percent, with heifers making up 30.6 percent of cattle slaughter. Steer and heifer combined slaughter is down 5.3 percent for the year to date and was down a stronger 6.7 percent in October. Last year, annual heifer slaughter was down 1.48 percent from 2012 and in October was up over 5 percent from the previous year. This indicates that heifer retention was pre-empted in 2013 and that intended replacements were diverted into feedlots due to drought conditions, showing up as increased heifer slaughter late in the year. The sustained decrease in heifer slaughter in 2014 is an indication of more success in heifer retention this year.

Total cow slaughter is down 14.5 percent so far this year with dairy cow slaughter down 10.9 percent and beef cow slaughter down 18.1 percent for the year to date. Cow slaughter is a smaller percentage of cattle slaughter this year with total cow slaughter representing 17.9 percent of total slaughter, down from 19.5 percent one year ago. October beef cow slaughter was down 20.6 percent compared to last year. This follows a 6.4 percent year over year decrease in beef cow slaughter in 2013, most of which occurred as a 14 percent year over year decrease in the second half of last year. The 20.6 percent beef cow slaughter decrease in October, 2014 follows a 16.4 percent year over year decrease in October, 2013 leading to a whopping 33.4 percent drop from October, 2012. Net beef herd culling (beef cow slaughter as a percent of January 1 beef cow herd inventory) has averaged 9.7 percent from 1986-2013, the period in which beef and dairy cow slaughter have been reported separately. In the last six years since 2008, beef cow culling has been higher, ranging from 10.5 percent to a record 12.3 percent in 2011. At the current pace of beef cow slaughter, net herd culling will likely fall below 9 percent in 2014 and may stay below the long term average for several more years.

Results of Adjusting Feed Levels for Cows During Cold Weather

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Beef cow nutritionists have known that cow energy requirements increase in cold weather. There is not much we can do about the weather, however adjustments in the diet of the range beef cows can mitigate the effects of the winter weather.

Many years ago, a northern Oklahoma rancher told about his method of maintaining body condition on fall-calving cows during the course of the winter. He watched the weather forecasts closely and increased the amount of supplement that he fed to the cows for about one day before a winter weather event and during the winter storm. Then he would return the supplement pattern back to pre-storm levels when the weather returned more to normal. For example, if he was feeding 5 pounds of a 20% range cube, he would increase that to 7 pounds per head during the wet, cold spell. Then he would return the level to 5 pounds when the weather returns to normal. Of course, his cattle had free-choice access to adequate standing native forage or grass hay. Note that cow size may require that supplement levels need to be adjusted accordingly. (This rancher had moderate sized 1100 pound cows in the 1970's when this was his "rule of thumb".)

Research about this subject bears out this rancher's observations. (See Table 1 below.) Results from an experiment at Kansas State University suggests several advantages for adjusting energy levels for cold weather. This information was gathered during the 1979 - 1980 winter. The K-State researchers used 60 commercial cows fed in dry lot and fed one-half of the cows a steady diet based upon the thermal neutral requirements for body weight maintenance; the other 30 cows were fed a ration adjusted for 1% more feed for each degree of coldness. Thermal neutral is generally considered to have its lower limits at 32 degrees wind chill index on cows with dry

hair coats. For each 1 degree decrease in wind chill index, the feed would be increased 1%. Beef cows exposed to cold require more energy for maintenance therefore the results below indicate the effectiveness of making those adjustments.

Table 1. Impact of adjusting winter ration for changes in weather

	Ration Adjusted for coldness	Ration NOT adjusted
Weight change during last 4.5 months of gestation	+115 pounds	+26 pounds
Weight change from fall to following fall at weaning	+10 pounds	-93 pounds
Percent cycling by 60 days after average calving date	82%	65%
Estimated date of conception in subsequent breeding season	June 5	June 15

Source: Ames, D. R. 1981. "Weather, what can you do about it?" in Western Beef Symposium October 26-27, 1981. Boise, Idaho.

There are several key implications from the results of this experiment. Cows that gained 115 pounds in the last 4.5 months of gestation should be in one full body condition score better at calving. This explains the increased cycling rate by 60 days after calving. In addition the 103 pound weight difference in the following fall indicates that the cows will go into the next winter in better body condition. The amount of additional feed (in the Kansas State study) to account for the cold weather events that winter would be equivalent to 125 pounds of corn per cow. The current prices of winter supplements must be considered when adjusting the ration to match the weather. HOWEVER, the expected continued high prices of calves in 2015 – 2016, means that every advantage to improve calf crop percentage or weaning weight should be utilized.

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