

# COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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## **Bigger beef cow herd; fastest growth in Southern Plains**

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The inventory of all cattle and calves was 89.8 million head on January 1, 2015, up 1.4 percent from one year ago but, except for last year, still the smallest total herd inventory since 1952. The 2014 calf crop was up 0.5 percent from 2013 at 33.9 million head. The 2014 calf crop percentage (calf crop as a percent of all cows) was 88.5 percent, the highest percentage since 2006. Total U.S. cattle on feed on January 1 were 13.1 million head, up one percent from last year. The estimated supply of feeder cattle outside feedlots was up 0.5 percent as a result of one percent increases in the inventory of steers, 500 pounds and over and calves, under 500 pounds; along with a slight decrease in the inventory of other heifers. Dairy cows and dairy replacement heifers were up one percent from one year ago.

The U.S. beef cow herd grew by 2.1 percent in 2014 to 29.7 million head according to the January, 2015 Cattle report. Though beef cow herd expansion was anticipated, this was a larger than expected increase. The largest increases were in Texas, at 107 percent of last year; and Oklahoma, up 6 percent from one year ago. These two states accounted for 62 percent of the total increase in the beef cow herd. Kansas and Missouri each accounted for about 10 percent of the cow herd increase meaning that those four states accounted for 82 percent of the total increase in beef cows. The increase in Texas beef cow inventory was higher than expected because, despite improved conditions, significant areas of drought remain in the state. There were some other surprising data in the report including the fact that California beef cow inventories were unchanged despite the severe drought in 2014, along with Oregon, which also experienced significant drought but had a 1.7 percent increase in the beef cow herd in the state. The lack of growth in the Northern Plains was also somewhat surprising with decreased

beef cow herds in North and South Dakota and a Nebraska beef cow herd unchanged from one year ago.

The inventory of beef replacement heifers was up 4 percent year over year indicating that further expansion is planned on the part of cow-calf producers. January 1 beef replacement heifers, as a percent of the beef cow herd was a record 19.5 percent, indicating intensive heifer retention. Moreover, the calculated percent of heifers entering the herd in 2014 jumped 23 percent year over year; with those heifers entering the herd representing 96 percent of NASS reported heifers expected to calve in 2014. Oklahoma beef replacement heifers were up 80,000 head, a 25 percent year over year increase, and accounted for 35 percent of the total increase in replacement heifers. The beef replacement heifer increase of 8 percent in Texas and the 12 percent increase in South Dakota, were the second and third largest increases in absolute numbers and, when combined with Oklahoma, represent 75 percent of the total increase in beef replacement heifers. Kansas also had an 8 percent year over year increase in beef replacement heifers.

This report does not change market fundamentals much, if any, in 2015. The fact that there are more cows than expected does not change the timing of beef production in 2015. The marginal increase in estimated feeder provides little relief to tight feeder numbers and may be offset with even more heifer retention and the possibility of smaller feeder cattle imports from Mexico and Canada this year. The jump-start to herd expansion could shave a year off of the time needed for herd rebuilding, depending on herd expansion in 2015 and beyond. In any event, herd expansion is expected to continue until late in the decade barring setbacks from drought.

## **Assisting the Posterior Presentation (Backwards Calf)**

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Any cow calf producer that has spent several years in the cattle business has had the experience of assisting a cow or heifer deliver a calf that was coming backwards. Understanding the physiology and anatomy of the calf and mother will improve the likelihood of a successful outcome. Study the diagram of the “posterior presentation” shown below.

Note the relative positions of the tailhead of the baby calf and the umbilical cord that connects the calf to the mother's blood supply. As the calf's hips are pulled through the pelvic opening, the baby calf's tail will reach the outer areas of the mother's vaginal opening. Once a person can see the baby calf's tailhead, the umbilical vessels are being compressed against the rim of the mother's pelvic bone. The blood flow, exchanging oxygen and carbon dioxide, between calf and mother is greatly impaired, if not completely clamped off.

Research, many years ago, conducted in Europe illustrates how little time it takes to compromise the calf's survivability when the umbilical cord is clamped. These scientists studied the impact of clamping the umbilical cord for 0, 4, 6, or 8 minutes.

**Table 1. Impact of clamping of umbilical vessels on calf survivability**

Duration of Clamping	Number of Calves	Fate of Calves
0 minutes	5 calves	All of the 5 calves lived
4 minutes	5 calves	4 lived; 1 died
6 minutes	3 calves	3 died
8 minutes	3 calves	3 died

Certainly, if a producer does not feel confident in their abilities to deliver the backward calf, call your veterinarian immediately. Time is of the essence. As producers examine heifers or cows at calving and find a situation where the calf is coming backward, they need to keep this European data in mind. If the calf's hips are not yet through the pelvic opening, they have a little time to locate help and have someone else to aid in the assistance process.

Once the cow and the producer in concert have pushed and pulled the calf's hips through the pelvic opening and the tailhead is apparent, the calf needs to be completely delivered as quickly as possible. The remainder of the delivery should go with less resistance as the hips are usually the toughest part to get through the pelvic opening. The shoulders may provide some resistance. However, some calf rotation and traction being applied as the cow strains will usually produce significant progress. Remember, the completion of the delivery is to be accomplished in about 4 minutes or less. The calf's head and nostrils are in the uterine fluids and cannot breathe until completely delivered. The calf must get oxygen rapidly to offset the hypoxia that it is been subjected to during the delivery. After the calf is delivered, clean the mouth and nostrils of fluids and tickle it's nostrils with a straw to cause snorting and inhalation of air to get it started to breathing.

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