

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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

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The calendar says that spring is here and it's beginning to show in Oklahoma. Some pastures (and lots of weeds) are greening up and grazing cattle demand is also building. Calf and stocker prices have increased back to levels of early January. Large runs of heavy feeder cattle so far March, combined with modest feedlot demand, have limited price increases for heavy feeder cattle, though prices have increased from February lows.

About 70 percent of Oklahoma is currently in moderate to exceptional drought. Recent rains in the southeast portion of the state have removed some dryness that threatened to add to drought totals. Over the winter the southeast one-third of the state has received more or less average rainfall along with a portion of the Panhandle that had above normal rainfall totals for the last 120 days. The area north and west of a line from the southwest corner of the state diagonally to the northeast corner of the state has received only 20 to 80 percent of normal precipitation through the winter resulting in exceptional drought in the southwest corner of the state with extreme and severe drought north through the western tier counties and eastward across the north central region.

Spring means that the severe weather season is approaching and Oklahomans know to keep an eye to the sky. Since 1950, Oklahoma has averaged 55 tornados per year. There is a threat of tornados in Oklahoma this week that may mark the beginning of the 2015 tornado season. The number of tornados typically increase significantly in April (with an average of 12), and peak in May (with an average of 22). Every county in Oklahoma experiences tornados. In the period from 1950-2013, the county total of tornados ranges from a low of 21 in Choctaw and Coal counties to a high of 109 tornados in Caddo county. Tornados not only cause injury to people

and damage to homes but can also impact livestock. Cattle may be injured, killed or scattered, with fences and facilities destroyed by tornados. Pastures may be strewn with debris, which can pose dangers to livestock or contaminate water supplies. Now is a good time for producers to review emergency preparedness plans for the home and the farm/ranch.

The severe storms and heavy rains that accompany tornados also produce the runoff needed to recharge surface water supplies. One of the current drought symptoms in Oklahoma is the low water level in ponds that are the principal source of drinking water for most cattle. Low pond levels are likely related to the fact that a record low 16 tornados were recorded in Oklahoma in 2014. Timely rainfall last year supported forage production generally better than drought conditions indicated but did little to help replenish water supplies, in part due to the lack of severe weather. In Oklahoma, it is not only the amount and seasonal timing of precipitation that matters, but also the type of weather event. As warm weather approaches, drought conditions could intensify rapidly. Forage conditions are a concern but water supplies may reach critical levels even more quickly. Unfortunately, the key to avoiding water limitations this spring likely depends on having a typical severe weather season.

Spring time storms and the cow herd

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist; (adapted from D. W. Smith, Extension Safety Program Specialist, Texas A&M)

Spring time is thunderstorm season across the Plains. Cleaning up after a severe storm is difficult enough. Losing valuable cattle brings additional financial hardship to the situation.

Cattle loss can occur in several scenarios. Livestock may be killed, lost, or stolen during a stormy situation. An accurate accounting of livestock and property is essential to a cattle operation's storm preparedness. Keep a CURRENT inventory of all animals and the pastures where they are located. Individual animal ID tags on all animals have several other purposes, but can become extremely valuable if cattle become scattered or even stolen. If these records are computer based, consider having a "back-up" copy stored at a neighbor's or a relative's house.

The Texas A&M Extension Disaster Education Network has an excellent fact sheet by David W. Smith (Extension Safety Program Specialist) on farmstead preparedness and care after a storm. It can be found on line at:<http://texashelp.tamu.edu/005-agriculture/farmstead-preparedness-recovery.php>

A few of their suggestions for protecting cattle from the aftermath of storms include:

1. Gather and dispose of trash, limbs, wire, and damaged equipment that could harm livestock. Clear and repair damaged fences.
2. Make sure livestock have plenty of water and food that have not been contaminated by pollutants. In some cases, it is necessary to truck in water and food, or to remove livestock from contaminated areas.
3. Properly and immediately dispose of dead carcasses. If rendering plants are still available in your area, they may process some dead animals. Those not processed should be buried

away from water bodies at least 3 to 4 feet deep and covered with quick-lime to accelerate decomposition.

4. Observe livestock for signs of infectious disease such as pneumonia or foot rot. All animals that die immediately following a disaster should be necropsied by a veterinarian.
5. Spray livestock with insect repellent in case of floods to protect against mosquitoes that may carry disease.

There are other things to consider when clearing the storm debris. Be mindful of such things as fiberglass insulation that is often scattered across pastures. Gather as much of the big pieces as possible so that cattle do not consume large amounts of the insulation. Also plastic bags may be ingested by cattle and cause compacted intestinal tracts. Avoid junk or debris that could be a source of lead. (This could really be an issue after a severe thunderstorm or tornado with wind damage which results in roofing debris spread across the pasture.) **DO NOT** allow cattle access to pastures where old car batteries or sources of crank case oil (old abandoned vehicles or machines) may cause lead poisoning.

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