

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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In this Issue:

May cattle market roundup

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

Realistic expectations for estrous synchronization and AI programs

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

May cattle market roundup

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

It's nearly May and the April showers continue in the southern plains bringing May forage. For the first time in a long time parts of western Oklahoma are experiencing flash flooding. Not only are we enjoying more rain than in many months, but the cumulative effect of continued rains, heavy in some locations, will provide better soil moisture penetration and surface water replenishment than the same moisture total in sporadic rains.

The April Cattle on Feed report pegs March feedlot placements fractionally above year ago levels, higher than expected. Placement consisted of a large increase in placements over 800 pounds with reduced placements for all weights under 800 pounds. March marketings were 98 percent of year earlier totals with one extra business day this year. The April 1 on-feed total was equal to the same time last year. Feedlot placements were up in Kansas, Iowa and Nebraska but down in Colorado, Oklahoma and Texas. Nebraska had the largest state cattle on feed total for April 1; exceeding Texas for the third month in a row. Nebraska briefly exceeded the Texas total last year on May 1 for the first time in the current cattle on feed data series back to 1992.

One third of the way through 2015, total cattle slaughter for the year to date is down 7.5 percent and beef production is down 5.3 percent. Total steer and heifer slaughter so far this year is down 7.3 percent, with heifer slaughter leading the decrease, down 8.2 percent. Total cow slaughter for the year to date is down 7.2 percent, with dairy cow slaughter up 2.1 percent and beef cow slaughter down 17.5 percent.

Reduced heifer and beef cow slaughter indicate that herd expansion is continuing and perhaps accelerating in 2015. The April 1 inventory of heifers on feed was the lowest quarterly heifer on feed total since October, 1996; near the end of the last complete cyclical expansion in the U.S.

beef cattle industry. Improving moisture conditions in Texas and Oklahoma increase the likelihood that herd expansion plans in those areas will continue. On January 1, 2015, the combined beef replacement heifer inventories in Texas and Oklahoma accounted for 58 percent of the year over year national increase in beef replacements, which was up 4 percent.

Realistic expectations for estrous synchronization and AI programs

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Producers that are wanting to improve the genetic makeup of their beef herds very often turn to artificial insemination (AI) as a tool to accomplish that goal. Many times, these producers have very high expectations as they begin the first season of artificial breeding. Perhaps they have heard other producers tell of situations where “near-perfect” pregnancy rates resulted from THEIR artificial insemination program. Everyone wants to get every cow or heifer bred as they start the labor and expense of an AI program. However, the rules of biology do not often allow for 100% pregnancy rates in most situations.

First of all it is important to understand several terms.

Estrous response rate: the percentage of cows found to be cycling in response to an estrus synchronization protocol. In other words, if we put 100 cows through the working chute and give them estrus synchronization drugs, and only 80 of those cows responded to the estrus synchronization products, then we have an “estrous response rate” of 80 percent. Perhaps some of the cows were not “ready” because they were later calving or they were in poorer body condition. If we are breeding only after they are detected in heat, then only 80 of the original 100 cows would be bred to AI. The effects of the drought may have an impact on the body condition of cows going in to the estrus synchronization protocols and adversely impact the percentage of cows responding to the synchronization products.

Conception rate: the percentage of the cows that were actually inseminated that were palpated and found to be pregnant 60 or more days later. In other words, of the 80 cows in the above example, that were found in heat and inseminated, IF we later found that 70 percent of those “settled” or became pregnant, we would have found 56 cows pregnant.

Pregnancy rate: the percentage of cows that were initially started on the estrus synchronization protocol that actually became pregnant. In the above example, 56 of the original 100 cows became pregnant to the AI program resulting in a pregnancy rate of 56%.

Therefore, the **Estrous response rate X Conception rate = Pregnancy rate.**

In this example: **80% Estrous response X 70% Conception = 56% Pregnant.** The above example is hypothetical, yet very much close to the expected outcome of a successful synchronization and AI program. If heat detection is incorporated as part of the system, then it becomes another very important part of the equation.

Research conducted that evaluated different synchronization protocols very often illustrated variables other than protocol were most important. Differences in body condition of the cattle, experience and skill of the AI technicians, and weather influences, often played larger roles in the pregnancy rates than did the synchronization protocol. There was more difference expressed between operations than between the synchronization methods chosen.

Help in choosing the synchronization protocol that best suits your situation can be found courtesy of the [Applied Reproductive Task Force](#). This group of scientists list preferred protocols for both replacement heifers and adult cows. Download their fact sheet at <http://beefrepro.unl.edu/pdfs/Protocols%20for%20Sire%20Directories%202015.pdf>

We hope everyone has 100 percent pregnancy rates this year and every year, **BUT, *lets also be realistic.***

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