

# COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

**May 11, 2015**

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

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## **North American cattle trade impacts U.S. cattle supplies**

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

Canada and Mexico have been a source of feeder and slaughter cattle for many years. This is in addition to bilateral trade in beef, with both countries among the major markets for U.S. beef exports as well as major sources of beef imports. In 2014, U.S. imports of Canadian slaughter steers and heifers represented 1.7 percent of total U.S. steer and heifer slaughter. These yearling slaughter cattle imports were up 13.9 percent from 2013 and included a 24 percent increase in slaughter heifers compared to a 7.4 percent year over year increase in slaughter steer imports. With the latest trade data for March, year to date slaughter steer and heifer imports from Canada are down 40.6 percent from last year based on a 49.5 percent decrease in slaughter steer imports and a 27.4 percent decrease in slaughter heifer imports.

Total feeder cattle imports from Mexico and Canada in 2014 amounted to 4.8 percent of the total 2014 U.S. calf crop. This was the largest relative contribution of Canadian and Mexican feeder cattle to U.S. feeder supplies in data back to 1992. U.S. imports of feeder cattle from Canada are up 11.7 percent year over year from January to March. This follows a 37.8 percent year over year increase in Canadian feeder cattle imports in 2014. Canadian feeder imports in 2014 consisted of a 60 percent increase in feeder heifers from the previous year. However, year to date imports of Canadian feeder heifers are down 10 percent compared to the January to March period one year ago. In contrast, feeder steer imports are up 57.1 percent so far this year. The weight of Canadian feeder cattle imports is also quite different this year compared to last. For the year to date, imports of Canadian feeder cattle over 700 pounds are up 58.0 percent from last year while imports of Canadian feeder cattle less than 700 pounds are down 10.6 percent.

Virtually all U.S. imports of Mexican cattle are feeder cattle. Imports of Mexican feeder cattle are up 7.5 percent in the first three months of 2015 compared to last year. This follows a 12.8

percent annual increase in Mexican feeder imports in 2014. Similar to Canada, 2014 Mexican feeder imports included more heifers, up 23.3 percent year over year compared to a 10.4 percent increase in Mexican feeder steer imports. However, year to date in 2015, imports of Mexican feeder heifers are down 17.3 percent while steer imports are up 13.1 percent. Mexican feeder cattle are generally lighter in weight than Canadian feeder cattle with most Mexican feeders split between the 450 to 700 pound category and those under 450 pounds. Few Mexican feeder cattle imports weigh more than 700 pounds. Compared to last year, year to date imports of Mexican feeder cattle between 450 and 700 pounds are up 30.7 percent while imports of feeder cattle under 450 pounds are down 20.3 percent.

Several implications are indicated from these trade flows. First, fewer heifers are being imported from Canada and Mexico suggesting that domestic herd expansion may be beginning in 2015 in both countries. Second, fewer heifers and generally tight cattle inventories in both Mexico and Canada may limit total cattle imports additionally later in the year. Feeder cattle imports may total close to year ago levels and could end up smaller if monthly imports drop sharply later this year. Finally, imports so far this year from both Canada and Mexico have included fewer lightweight animals than is typical in each market. This suggests that imports are somewhat “front-loaded” with respect to weight, which will have some implications for total U.S feeder supplies later in the year.

## **Look back at the spring calving season and start to make improvements now**

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Only 1 to 2 months ago the spring calving cows were calving, the temperature was cold and some of the calving pastures were muddy. Experience would say that you do not want to ask cow calf operators how “calving” is then, because the response would be less than objective, reflecting bone-chilling cold and not enough sleep. However if you wait too long, perhaps until this fall, time will have mellowed most of the events and one soon has difficulty matching a calving season with particular problems. Now is perhaps the best time to make a few notes on what to change for next year.

The first step is to list the dead calves. Hopefully, your cattle are in a record system that will provide that information. If not, grab a piece of paper and pencil and list the calves. Your calving notebook should have the dead calves checked off and a brief notation on what happened to each. Until all the calves are listed, the shock of lost opportunities has not had its full impact.

Can you identify a pattern of problems?

Was most of the death loss right at delivery and involved two-year old heifers? This could indicate that sire selection needs to be done more carefully, with attention being paid to low birth weight EPD sires for heifers. Perhaps the heifers were underdeveloped. This could contribute to more calving difficulty than necessary. Do you provide assistance to heifers after they have been in stage II of labor for one hour? Longer deliveries result in stress on both calf and cow.

Was the death loss more prevalent after the calves had reached 10 days to 2 weeks of age? This of course often means that calf diarrhea (or scours) is a major concern. Calf scours will be more likely to occur to calves from first calf heifers. Calves that receive inadequate amounts of colostrum within the first 6 hours of life are 5 to 6 times more likely to die from calf scours. Calves that are born to thin heifers are weakened at birth and receive less colostrum which compounds their likelihood of scours. Often, these same calves were born via a difficult delivery and adds to the chances of getting sick and dying. All of this means that we need to

reassess the bred heifer growing program to assure that the heifers were in a body condition score of 6 (moderate flesh) at calving time.

Did you introduce a baby calf from another herd during the calving season? A calf may have been purchased from a neighbor or at a livestock market. Perhaps the new calf was brought home to foster on to a cow that lost her calf. This has been shown to introduce new pathogens into a herd even though the purchased calf appeared healthy. Placing the new calf and foster mother in a separate pen for at least 30 days should greatly reduce the risk of introduction of new diseases into the rest of the calves.

Do you use the same trap or pasture each year for calving? There may be a buildup of bacteria or viruses that contribute to calf diarrhea in that pasture. This particular calving pasture may need a rest for the upcoming calving season. Plus it is always a good idea to get new calves and their mothers out of the calving pasture as soon as they can be moved comfortably to a new pasture to get them away from other potential calf scour organisms. A complicated, but effective method of curtailing calf diarrhea outbreaks in larger herds is the “Nebraska Sandhill Calving System”. Read more about this at the following website:

<https://beef.unl.edu/beefreports/symp-2007-17-xx.shtml>

Pre-calving scours vaccines (to the cows) may be recommended by your veterinarian for next winter and spring. This should be considered an important short-term plan to reduce the incidence of calf diarrhea. The above suggestions are more long-term solutions to the problem.

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