

# COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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## **Avian Influenza and meat markets**

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

The Avian Influenza outbreak continues to grow and leads to more questions about the impact on livestock and meat markets. USDA-APHIS (Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service) reports that the current toll is nearly 34 million birds depopulated. The majority of these are laying hens, followed by turkeys with relatively few broilers at this time. As a result, the biggest and most immediate impact for consumers is in egg markets, especially in the north central part of the country. The reduced supply of table eggs as well as breaking eggs used in food service will impact consumers directly and indirectly.

The direct impact of Avian Influenza on poultry meat supply is minimal and likely to remain that way. The current depopulation total of 33.8 million birds is 0.38 percent of the 2014 poultry slaughter total of 8.9 billion birds. As bad as it is, it is very unlikely that enough birds will be slaughtered to impact domestic poultry production significantly. Even for turkeys, which only represent 2.7 percent of total poultry slaughter, the current turkey depopulation represents less than 3 percent of 2014 U.S turkey slaughter. Both broiler and turkey production are still expected to surpass year ago totals unless the outbreak expands significantly.

While the direct loss of birds is unlikely to materially impact total poultry production, the impact on domestic consumption is more likely to be significant and is counterintuitive. The biggest impact of Avian Influenza on meat markets is the closure of poultry export markets. In 2014, 8.2 billion pounds of poultry were exported from the U.S., which is 18.2 percent of the 45 billion pounds of total poultry production. Both broiler and turkey exports, already struggling in 2015, are forecast to decrease even more in 2015 as result of the outbreak. Broiler exports are expected to be down roughly 9 percent, though the situation is very dynamic and the impact could get larger or smaller depending what happens in the coming weeks.

Decreased broiler exports will add to already expanding broiler production resulting in increased domestic consumption of broilers. The anticipated 5.2 percent year over year increase in broiler production, augmented with decreased broiler exports, is expected to push domestic broiler consumption up by roughly 6.5 percent. Increased broiler production will combine with an expected 6.7 year over year increase in pork production to push total 2015 U.S. meat and poultry production up by 3.5 percent despite a projected 1 to 2 percent year over year decrease in beef production. Per capita beef consumption may show a slight year over year increase in 2015 with increased beef imports and decreased beef exports. Total domestic red meat and poultry consumption is projected to increase by 4.2 percent compared to year ago levels.

## **Another look at fall versus spring calving**

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

As cow herd managers monitor the pasture conditions this spring and make decisions about rebuilding a depleted cow herd, some may wish to rethink the time of year that breeding and calving take place. New data from Tennessee on a fescue-based forage system gives us more information about the direct comparison between fall and spring calving.

In the April, 2013 edition the Professional Animal Scientist, they reported on nineteen years of data comparing fall and spring calving on an experiment station in that state. Over a span of 19 years, they had data from 478 spring-calving cows and 474 fall-calving cows. The fall calving cows weaned 193 more calves (over those 19 years ) than did the spring calving cows. The spring-born calves grew faster and had higher 205 weights, but the fall-calving herd had increased income because of greater number of calves and a reduced need for replacement heifers.

The endophyte-infected fescue may have been a factor in the summer breeding seasons that resulted in significantly fewer calves per cow over the 19 years. The wild type endophyte (*Neotyphodium coenophialum*) has been shown to reduce a cow's ability to regulate body temperature which would be an important trait in summer breeding seasons. [Source: A comparison of spring- and fall-calving beef herds grazing tall fescue. Campbell, et al., 2013. Prof. Anim. Sci. vol. 29, no. 2, pp 172-178.](#)

Oklahoma producers using native or Bermuda pastures should also consider fall-calving. Avoiding the intense heat of an Oklahoma summer during breeding will improve reproductive efficiency. Fall-calving occurs when temperatures are more moderate for those 2 am heifer checks and calf survival is higher due to less cold stress and dry calving pastures.

Fall-calving cows should be in excellent body condition at calving and therefore return to estrus cycles on time to breed for next year's calf crop. Winter weather in the Southern Plains does not appear to impair re-breeding efficiency in most winters.

Examine when would be the best time to breed the cows or replacement heifers—in the late spring/early summer or in the late fall/early winter? Your answer may depend on the forage

base, your other farming enterprises, and off-farm job responsibilities. Fall-calving makes a lot of sense in Oklahoma if the owner/manager can make it work with other responsibilities.

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