

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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By Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Turning fewer cattle into bigger feedlot inventories

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The June USDA Cattle on Feed report shows May placements at 90 percent of last year and marketings at 92 percent of last year. There was one less business day in May this year compared to last year. The June 1 on-feed total was 101 percent of last year.

Feedlot inventories have averaged 0.4 percent higher each month on a year over year basis in the first six months of 2015. This compares to the same period last year when monthly feedlot inventories were down 2.4 percent on a year over year basis. Feedlot inventories transitioned to higher levels in late 2014 as a result of several factors. Large placements of lightweight feedlot placements in the first half of 2014 contributed to a trend of increased days on feed that began in the second quarter of 2014. Though feedlot placements have been dominated by heavyweight placements since the middle of 2014, increased days on feed has continued as feedlots pushed carcass weights to record levels. Carcass weights for the year to date in 2015 are up an average of 2.2 percent year over year compared to an average 0.1 percent decrease for the same period last year. These factors have contributed a slower feedlot marketing rate. Marketings as a percent of feedlot inventories have averaged 15.2 percent for the year to date compared to 16.2 percent for the same period last year.

Relatively constant feedlot inventories the past few months may create the illusion that feedlot production is holding close to year ago levels. However, feedlot placements have been below year earlier levels for 13 of the past 15 months. The 12-month moving average of feedlot placements has continued to decline and is at the lowest level in May for the current feedlot data series going back to 1996. Fewer feedlot placements inevitably results in fewer cattle for slaughter. In slaughter data back to 1950, the April 12-month moving average of steer and heifer slaughter is at the lowest level since November, 1968.

Steer and heifer slaughter is down 6.6 percent for the year to date compared to the same period last year contributing to a 5.1 percent year to date decrease in beef production. Herd expansion adds an additional squeeze to tight cattle supplies as a result of increased heifer retention. The most recent weekly slaughter data shows that heifer slaughter as a percent of combined steer and heifer slaughter is at the lowest level since June 1974. Cattle supplies and feedlot production will remain tight through the remainder of 2015.

Long term management to reduce eye problems in cattle

By Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Pinkeye has long been a costly nuisance to cattle producers. Eye infections sometimes lead to partial or complete blindness in one or both eyes. Reduced beef production in the form of lowered weight gain, milk production, body condition, and eventually even poorer reproduction can result from eye infections and lesions. One of the culprits that initiates and spreads eye problems between herds and among herdsmates is “Pinkeye” or more properly called Infectious Bovine Keratoconjunctivitis. An excellent Oklahoma State University fact sheet about the prevention and treatment of “Pinkeye” is available online at:

<http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-2689/VTMD-9128web.pdf>.

Iowa State University animal scientists analyzed field data from ISU herds and cooperator herds in 2003 through 2005. They sought to estimate the genetic measurements that could aid in the selection of cattle resistant to Infectious Bovine Keratoconjunctivitis (IBK), commonly known as pinkeye. They found a decrease in weaning weight of 30 pounds per calf infected with pinkeye. The analysis of the field data revealed an estimate of 0.11 for heritability of resistance to pinkeye. **This estimate is considered to be of low heritability, which indicates that only slow progress can be made based on selection for IBK resistance.** It does mean that, over time, if we select replacements from cows that are not prone to having eye problems (especially pinkeye) we would be able to very gradually reduce the incidence of pinkeye in our herds.

Also they studied the immune components involved in eye disease defense mechanisms. Tear samples were collected from the eyes of 90 calves in 2004 in order to quantify immunoglobulins (commonly called antibodies). The result of this analysis indicated that as the amount of Immunoglobulin A in the tears increases, the likelihood of infection and/or the severity of infection decreased. **This information would suggest that properly fed, properly immunized cattle, with a strong immune system will be more resistant to pinkeye.** Source: [Rodriguez and co-workers. Iowa State University Animal Industry Report 2006.](#)

Insects are known to be carriers of the infectious agents causing eye problems. Fly control continues to be necessary due to isolated areas in Oklahoma having a significant face fly population. Insecticide fly tags, sprays, charged backrubbers, and dusts bags are products that

can provide chemical control. Manure, weed, and brush management are also necessary for better fly control.

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