

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Oklahoma hay and pasture situation

Derrell S. Peel, Oklahoma State University

U.S. hay stocks on May 1, the beginning of the hay crop year, were estimated at 24.5 million tons, up 27.9 percent from last year and 73.2 percent above the 2013 drought lows. The 2015 level was the highest May 1 hay stock level since 2005. U.S. hay supplies are projected to be slightly higher this year with lower prices anticipated for both alfalfa and other hay. The Oklahoma May 1 hay stocks level was 1.44 million tons, up 31 percent from one year ago and the highest level since 2008. In Oklahoma, as well as nationally, hay stocks have recovered dramatically from the drought reduced levels in recent years.

The wettest May on record and more rain in June has impacted Oklahoma hay quantity and quality. The floods in May and June resulted in damage or destruction of some stored hay and some new hay production. Low lying alfalfa fields were flooded long enough to kill the alfalfa in some cases and some grass hay fields near rivers were covered with silt and sand. In many cases hay production was nearly impossible during this period resulting in reduced production and poor quality for hay that was excessively mature when it was finally harvested. In particular, wheat that was intended for hay was delayed to the point that the quality was very low as the wheat moved toward maturity before harvesting.

More rain and flash flooding are forecast in Oklahoma this week which will further add to the difficulties in harvesting hay. The delays in hay harvest may reduce both the quantity and quality of hay production this year. With flooding losses pulling down the May 1 Oklahoma hay stocks estimate and reduced production this year, overall hay supplies in Oklahoma will likely be smaller than previously projected. At this point no significant hay shortages are anticipated but producers in some regions are concerned. The most likely scenario is ample supplies of medium

to low quality hay that will be difficult to utilize effectively and will increase cattle nutritional management requirements this winter.

Despite the continuing severe drought in the west, pasture and range conditions are significantly better this year compared to this time last year. Across the U.S. 65 percent of pastures were rated good to excellent compared to 58 percent last year while 9 percent were rated poor to very poor compared to 15 percent at this time last year. The latest pasture and range conditions in Oklahoma were rated at 67 percent good to excellent compared to 39 percent at this time last year. Nine percent of Oklahoma pastures are currently rated poor or very poor compared to 24 percent one year ago. Continued rainfall means that good pasture and range conditions are expected to persist this summer. This is a year when it is easy to grow forage but challenging to harvest hay. Grazing management will be key to maintaining forage quantity and quality, not only for the summer but to plan ahead for fall and winter. Carefully planned grazing management and pasture fertility can go a long way to utilizing forage effectively this summer and stockpiling pasture for later use.

With better forage conditions comes the opportunity for Oklahoma cattle producers to implement more aggressive cattle production and marketing plans. Feeder cattle prices are currently 10 to 20 percent above this time last year. Cull cow prices are holding slightly above year ago levels as beef cow slaughter continues 18 percent below last year for the year to date. Replacement female values continue strong for open replacement heifers, bred heifers, bred cows and cow-calf pairs. Managing forage resources for continued recovery and long term productivity along with realistic forage production estimates should be the basis for any changes or expansion of cattle production.

Closely monitor medicated mineral intake

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Animal Scientist

Medicated minerals are available and frequently used to help prevent the blood-borne disease, anaplasmosis. A consistent and appropriate intake of the mineral is critical to a successful anaplasmosis prevention program. Cow calf operators will want to monitor mineral consumption closely to be certain that the label-recommended amounts are being consumed by the cattle. In the near future, a “Veterinary Feed Directive” (VFD) will be necessary for most antibiotic feeding in mineral supplements. Contact and work with your local large animal veterinarian about the appropriate VFD for your operation. For more information and access to the full VFD rule, visit the FDA/CVM website at fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary.

The most popular means of anaplasmosis prevention is the use of mineral mixes that contain chlortetracycline (CTC). When fed at a rate of 0.5 mg/lb. of body weight CTC will reduce the risk of anaplasmosis infections. ([November, 2013 Veterinary Entomology vol. 6, issue 4](#)) It is important to note, however, that CTC is added to minerals for several different reasons, and these other uses require different levels of drug in the mineral. Make sure that the product you choose states on the label that it is formulated at a rate for the prevention of anaplasmosis, and gives the specific amount of daily consumption needed to supply that level. The next step is to monitor your herd to make sure that the product is being consumed at the appropriate rate. If not, you

may need to look at other products or change your management practices in order to correct consumption deficits. Recovered animals will be carriers of the disease and a source of infection for susceptible individuals. Clear them of the organism with high levels of antibiotics administered parentally, isolate them from susceptible animals, or cull them from the herd.

Placement of mineral feeders and blocks can aid in achieving optimum mineral intake. Place them in areas where cattle spend a lot of time. Minerals should be placed in loafing areas, near water sources, in shady areas, or any other location that tends to be a popular place for the herd to congregate. A rule of thumb is to provide one mineral feeding station for every 30 to 50 cows. Check feeders at least once a week and keep a clean, fresh supply of minerals present at all times. A good feeder should keep minerals dry, be portable and hold up to abuse and corrosion. Open tubs are not adequate in high rainfall areas.

Summer often becomes a busy time of year for ranchers (especially during haying season). Don't forget to check the mineral feeders or blocks to be certain that they are supplying the minerals that your cows need. If you have questions about anaplasmosis prevention or suspect that an animal in your herd has anaplasmosis, call your veterinarian for help with treatment.

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