

# COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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

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## **More cattle mid-year**

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

The July Cattle report confirms that U.S. cattle herd inventories are growing. The inventory of all cattle and calves on July 1 was 98.4 million head, up 2.2 percent from last year. The 2015 calf crop is estimated at 34.3 million head, up 1.2 percent from last year. Beef cow numbers were estimated to be up 2.5 percent at 30.5 million head. Beef replacement heifers were pegged at 4.9 million head, up 6.5 percent year over year. Slaughter data and the latest cattle on feed report confirm the herd expansion indicated in the inventory estimates. Beef cow slaughter is down 17 percent and heifer slaughter down 11 percent for the year to date compared to one year ago. The number of heifers on feed in feedlots on July 1 was down 6.9 percent year over year, and is the lowest quarterly heifer on feed inventory since October, 1996.

The dairy cow inventory is estimated at 9.3 million head, up 0.5 percent from last year. The inventory of dairy replacement heifers in the mid-year report is 4.2 million head, up 2.4 percent from one year ago. The increase in dairy cows and dairy replacement heifers is in contrast to the 4.2 percent year over year increase in dairy cow slaughter for the year to date.

The estimated July 1 inventory of steers over 500 pounds was 14.1 million head, up 2.9 percent year over year, while the number of other heifers over 500 pounds was 6.8 million head, down 1.4 percent. The inventory of calves less than 500 pounds was 26.7 million head, up 2.3 percent year over year. The total number of cattle on feed in the U.S. on July 1 was estimated at 12.1 million head, up 1.7 percent from last year. These estimates lead to an estimated July supply of feeder cattle outside feedlots of 35.5 million head, up 1.8 percent from one year ago.

The monthly July Cattle on Feed report shows the inventory of cattle on feed in feedlots with a thousand head or more of capacity to be up 1.9 percent from last year. June placements in feedlots were 0.9 percent higher than last year with June feedlot marketings 5.4 percent below

one year ago. In contrast to the quarterly heifer on feed inventory reported in the first paragraph, the inventory of steers on feed was up 7.1 percent year over year, the largest July 1 feedlot inventory of steers since 2006. The year over year increase steers on feed is 461 thousand head, close to the 400 thousand head increase in the estimated inventory of steers over 500 pounds. This suggests that most of the big steers are already in the feedlot. The increase in estimated feeder supply indicates that more feeder cattle are in the pipeline but it appears that the majority of the increase is in “new crop” calves that will be placed late in the year and into next year and will affect 2016 beef production more than 2015 beef production. However, the current feedlot inventory includes a high proportion of steers, including the larger number of heavy weight placements in June, that will finish in the second half of this year. Combined steer and heifer slaughter, down 6.8 percent for the year to date, should close the gap a bit in the last half of the year and will likely be down 4-5 percent for the year.

## **Stockpiled bermudagrass can reduce winter feed costs**

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Harvested forage costs are a large part of the production costs associated with cow-calf enterprises. A 15 year-old OSU trial had the objective to economically evaluate stockpiled bermudagrass. The research found that this practice can reduce cow-wintering costs. Forage accumulation during the late summer and fall is variable from year to year depending on moisture, temperatures, date of first frost and fertility.

The OSU research has found that 50 to 100 pounds per acre of actual nitrogen fertilizer applied in the late summer has produced 1000 – 2000 pounds of forage per acre. In some ideal situations even more forage has been produced.

Studies between 1997 and 2000 found stockpiled bermudagrass protein concentrations were quite impressive, even after frost. In November, the range of protein content of the standing forage was 13.1% to 15.2%. The protein held up in December and ranged from 12.5% to 14.7% and declined to 10.9% to 11.6% in January.

To make best use of the stockpiled forage, supplementation with 2 pounds of 14% to 25% protein feed beginning in early December is recommended. [Read about these studies in the 2001 OSU Animal Science Research Report](#). Some information about the forage quality is reported in the [1999 OSU Animal Science Research Report](#).

### **Planning for the stockpiling of Bermuda must begin now.**

The following is a list of recommendations for stockpiling bermudagrass pastures for best results and reducing winter feed bills:

1. Remove existing forage by haying, clipping, or grazing by late August
2. Apply 50 to 100 pounds of actual nitrogen fertilizer per acre.
3. Defer grazing until at least late October or early November.

4. Control access to forage by rotational or strip grazing to cut waste and extend grazing.
5. If cool season forage is available for use in the winter, use the stockpiled bermudagrass first.
6. Supplementation (2 pounds of 14 – 25% protein) should begin in early December.
7. Provide free-choice mineral (6%- 9% phosphorus and Vitamin A) with a trace-mineral package

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