

# COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Professor Emeritus

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

## **Growing bred replacement heifers**

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Bred replacement heifers that will calve in January and February need to continue to grow and maintain body condition. Ideally, two year old heifers should be in a body condition score 6 at the time that their first calf is born. This allows them the best opportunity to provide adequate colostrum to the baby, repair the reproductive tract, return to heat cycles, rebreed on time for next year, and continue normal body growth. From now on until calving time, the heifers will need to be gaining 1 to 1 ½ pounds per head per day, assuming that they are in good body condition coming out of summer.

Heifers will need supplemental protein, if the major source of forage in the diet is Bermuda grass or native pasture or grass hay. If the forage source is adequate in quantity and average in quality (6-9% crude protein), heifers will need about 2 pounds of a high protein (38-44% CP) supplement each day. This will probably need to be increased with higher quality hay (such as alfalfa) or additional energy feed (20% range cubes) as winter weather adds additional nutrient requirements.

Wheat pasture (if adequate rainfall produces growth) can be used as a supplement for pregnant replacement heifers. Using wheat pasture judiciously makes sense for pregnant heifers for two reasons. Pregnant heifers consuming full feed of wheat pasture will gain at about 3 pounds per head per day. If they are on the wheat too long, the heifers can become very fat and cause dystocia (calving difficulty.) Also, the wheat pasture can be used for gain of stocker cattle or weaned replacement heifers more efficiently. If wheat pasture is used for bred heifers, use it as a protein supplement by allowing the heifers access to the wheat pasture on at least alternate days. Some producers report that 1 day on wheat pasture and two days on native or Bermuda will work better. This encourages the heifers to go rustle in the warm season pasture for the second day, rather than just stand by the gate waiting to be turned back in to the wheat. Whatever method is used to grow the pregnant replacement heifers, plan to have them in good body condition by calving so that they will grow into fully-developed productive cows.

# Late summer Oklahoma crop and forage conditions

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

My travels recently have taken me across quite a bit of Oklahoma and the surrounding region and left me with several impressions. The most prominent impression is that it is remarkably green in Oklahoma for late August. Drought conditions dissipated in May and June and most of the state has received some rain in the past couple of weeks with the exception of parts of south central and southeastern Oklahoma. Topsoil moisture across the state is rated at 62 percent adequate to surplus. In general, forage and summer crop conditions look quite good across the state. The Oklahoma grain sorghum crop is rated 79 percent good to excellent and production is projected to be up 46 percent from last year with increased acres and higher yields. Pasture and range in Oklahoma is rated at 58 percent good to excellent with another 31 percent rated fair. Cows look to be in good condition with abundant forage this summer. Good pasture conditions is likely extending the grazing season for some summer stockers and may result in fall yearling sales a bit later than usual and at heavier weights.

The second impression from my travels is the large amount of hay that has been produced this summer despite the difficulties caused by wet conditions early in the summer. USDA estimates Oklahoma alfalfa hay production up nearly 18 percent over last year with higher yields offsetting a 10 percent reduction in harvested acres. Other Hay production is projected nine percent lower year over year with fewer harvested acres and yields equal to year ago levels. Hay production has been large in the second half of the summer and likely offsets some of the reduced production in May and June. In my travels I noticed significant production of forage sorghums of various types that appeared in good condition. Recent hot weather has resulted in some problems with prussic acid and nitrates in forage sorghums and similar forages so producers should test before grazing or harvesting.

There have however, been numerous reports of lower quality in both grass hay and alfalfa hay for a variety of reasons. Some of the delayed May and June hay harvest was overly mature and lower in quality. In other instances, excessive moisture either leached nitrogen or prevented proper fertilization and resulted in lower quality hay. Hay harvested later in the summer appears to have better quality in many cases. With adequate quantity and widely variable quality of hay, it is important for cattle producers to 1) test hay so you know exactly what you have and 2) develop a plan to best utilize hay of variable quality and determine supplement needs to accompany hay use.

My final impression from travels this past week is that a lot of winter wheat ground is being prepared for planting. Final fieldwork and nitrogen application is well underway and it appears that many wheat acres will get planted in the next two or three weeks. With generally good soil moisture conditions, the prospects for abundant wheat grazing are very good. This will likely translate into considerable demand for stocker cattle in the next few weeks if crop development proceeds well over the next four to eight weeks.

Recent volatility in cattle markets highlights the fact that stocker producers should monitor cattle markets closely and evaluate buying opportunities for stockers of various weights and types. Current feeder price relationships show some advantage in value of gain for stockers over

500 pounds compared to the lighter weight calves. Applying a sharp pencil before buying is one of the best ways to increase the chances for good returns to winter grazing.

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