

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Wheat pasture developing slowly in the Southern Plains

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Last week's Crop Progress report indicated that 65 percent of Oklahoma winter wheat was planted, close to the five-year average of 66 percent. Most of the remaining one-third of wheat to be planted is for grain-only rather than for dual-purpose or forage-only. The percentage of wheat emerged was 32 percent, less than the five-year average of 36 percent for this date. Much of Oklahoma has received little rain in the past 30-45 days and that, along with unseasonably warm temperatures, has impacted winter wheat with delayed emergence and delayed development. A majority of the planted wheat is up but it is not growing much with the current dry conditions. However, conditions are spotty with better moisture in some regions, including northwest Oklahoma and the Panhandle, resulting in wheat stands that could be ready for grazing relatively soon. Widespread problems with fall armyworms have caused significant stand damage in some cases and many wheat acres have been sprayed this fall. It will take a hard freeze to slow the impact of fall armyworms.

Current forecasts call for significant rain across Oklahoma this week as the anticipated El Niño weather pattern may finally be developing. If this occurs, wetter conditions may prevail and wheat pasture will likely develop rapidly, albeit a bit later than previously anticipated. The stand is in place for a significant quantity of wheat pasture yet this fall and winter. Wheat pasture stocker cattle demand has been muted this fall with uncertainty about both wheat pasture conditions and cattle markets holding stocker producers in check.

Feeder cattle markets participated in the fed cattle market crash in September and early October but appear to have bottomed and showed significant recovery this past week. More recovery is likely into November and may be boosted by stocker cattle demand if the forecast rain

materializes this week. Demand for heavy feeder cattle may also pick up as feedlots take advantage of lower feeder prices and restock after marketing significant numbers of heavy fed cattle. Current stocker prices may represent a rapidly dwindling buying opportunity as feeder markets recover the next couple of weeks.

The bulk of the fall run of spring-born calves will be coming to market from now into early December. While calf prices will likely continue to bounce back from the recent crash, the amount of calf and feeder price recovery into November is the subject of speculation. It will depend on the number of new crop calves; these coming from a larger 2015 calf crop but with an unknown amount of heifer retention tempering the increased supply. It will depend as well on the number of summer yearlings yet to be marketed this fall. There is considerable variation among analysts about the yearling supply with some feeling that good summer conditions have delayed marketings of yearlings this fall and more numbers are yet to hit the markets. Others believe that the number of steers in feedlots all year means that the number of remaining steers is limited and that much of the grass has been occupied by replacement heifers. At this point I don't see any strong indication of a significant backlog of delayed summer yearlings that will unduly pressure feeder markets.

Poor temperament adversely affects profit

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

October is a traditional weaning and culling time for spring-calving herds. This is a time when producers decide which cows no longer are helpful to the operation and which heifer calves will be kept for future replacements. Selecting against ill-tempered cattle has always made good sense. Wild cattle are hard on equipment, people, other cattle, and now we know that they are hard on the bottom line.

Mississippi State University researchers (Vann and co-workers, 2006. Southern Section of American Society of Animal Science) used a total of 210 feeder cattle consigned by 19 producers in a "Farm to Feedlot" program to evaluate the effect of temperament on performance and net profit. Temperament was scored on a 1 to 5 scale (1=nonaggressive, docile; 5=very aggressive, excitable). Three measurements were used: pen score, chute score, and exit velocity. Measurements were taken on the day of shipment to the feedlot. Exit velocity is an evaluation of temperament that is made electronically by measuring the speed at which the animal leaves the confinement of the chute. Exit velocity and pen scores were highly correlated. As pen scores increased, so did exit velocity. As pen score and exit velocity increased, health treatments costs and number of days treated increased, while average daily gain and final body weight decreased. As pen score increased, net profit per head tended to decline. Pen temperament scores and net profits per head were as follows: 1=\$121.89; 2=\$100.98; 3=\$107.18; 4=\$83.75; 5=\$80.81. Although feed and cattle price relationships have changed since this data was collected, one would expect similar impacts from the temperaments of cattle under today's economic situation.

Colorado State University (Voisinet, 1996) conducted an experiment examining the effects of temperament on weight gains and the incidence of dark cutting. Cattle were temperament ranked,

on a 5 point system, while animals were held on a single animal scale. Their results show that there is a highly significant effect of temperament ranking on average daily gain. Animals exhibiting the highest temperament ranking also have the lowest average daily gains. Conversely, animals that were the calmest had the highest average daily gains. Their results also show that those cattle that have the highest temperament ranking, those that were berserk, also have the highest incidence of dark cutters. Dark cutter carcasses will be discounted approximately 20-25 dollars per hundred pounds compared to carcasses with normal colored lean. In fact 25% of the cattle that had a temperament score of 5 exhibited dark cutting, while less than 5% of the cattle that had temperament scores of 1,2,3, and 4 exhibited dark cutting.

“Heritability” is the portion of the differences in a trait that can be attributed to genetics. The heritability of temperament in beef cattle has been estimated to range from 0.36 to 0.45. This moderate level of heritability indicates that real progress can be made by selecting against wild cattle. Whether we are marketing our calf crop at weaning or retaining ownership throughout the feedlot phase, wild, excitable cattle are expensive to own and raise.

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