



Agricultural Newsletter



Blaine County Cooperative Extension Service, 212 N. Weigle, Watonga, OK 73772 – 580-623-5195
August – Sept. 2008 Email: blaineco@watonga.com

Fall Born Calves Have Lighter Birth Weights

Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Beef Cattle Reproduction Specialist

The beginning of August reminds us that the fall calving season is not far away. Most fall calving cows are in excellent body condition because of the availability and quality of standing forage in the pastures. Some producers may be misled into believing that the fall-calving cow, in a body condition score of 6 or better, will have a larger birth weight calf because of the excellent nutrition during pregnancy. However, research data does not confirm this belief.

Oklahoma State University researchers used five years of data from the North Lake Carl Blackwell range to answer the question of birth weight differences due to seasons. Records of 414 live births (242 spring and 172 fall) from cows of five crossbred cow groups were analyzed for differences in birth weight. The cows ranged in age from 4 to 7 years old. All cows were bred artificially to the same Salers and Limousin bulls. Fall calving cows delivered smaller birth weight calves (77.7 pounds) than did spring calving cows (82.2 pounds).

The reason that fall calving cows have lighter birth weights is generally attributed to the fact that the cows are gestating in hot weather. Blood flow patterns of cattle during periods of high temperatures change in an effort to dissipate heat from the body. Blood (and the nutrients that it carries) is shunted to the outer extremities during hot weather to dissipate heat. Therefore less blood flow is sent to the inner core of the cow where the fetus is gestating. This subtle change in blood flow is commonly thought to be the reason that lighter birth weights occur to cattle that are in the last trimester of pregnancy in June, July, and August. The small amount of difference noted in Oklahoma cattle did not cause a loss of viability of calves born in September and October.

Source: Selk and Buchanan, 1990 OSU Animal Science Research Report.

Hot Weather in Late Pregnancy Affects Gestation Length

Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Cattle Reproduction Specialist

Fall-calving cows and heifers don't always read and follow the published gestation tables for their respective breeds. It has been reported on several occasions that fall calving cows have lighter birth weights than spring calvers. Part of the reason for those lighter births may be attributed to shorter gestation lengths. Oklahoma State University physiologists studied early fall (August) and late fall (October) calving cows. Data from two successive years were combined for 50 Angus X Hereford crossbred cows. (Source: Kastner, Wettemann, and co-workers. 2004 Southern Section of American Society of Anim. Sci. Abstract 77).

The "early" and "late" fall calving cows had been artificially inseminated in early November or early January, respectively. Semen from the same sire was used for all cows. All cows were exposed to a single cleanup bull for 35 days at 4 days after the AI season. The weather prior to calving was significantly different for late pregnancy in the two groups. The average maximum temperature the week before calving was 93 degrees F. for the "early" fall group. The average maximum temperature the week before parturition in the "late" calving group was 66 degrees F. There was a 100% survival rate for calves in both groups and both groups of cows had very high re-breeding rates (93% and 96%, respectively).

The average gestation length for the "early fall" cows was 3 days shorter (280 days) as compared to the "late fall" cows (283 days). **Producers with early fall-calving cows should expect calves to start coming several days ahead of the "textbook gestation table" dates. They should begin their routine heifer and cow checks at least a week to 10 days ahead of the expected first calving date.** Therefore, this would be a good time to read the new Oklahoma State University Extension publication called "[Calving Time Management for Beef Cows and Heifers](#)". E-1006. This is an excellent review of calving management ideas for the experienced rancher as well as the new participant in the beef industry.

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Wheat Producers Should Evaluate Winter Grazing Potential

Derrell S. Peel, OSU Extension Livestock Marketing
Specialist

At the current time, we have triple digit temperatures in Oklahoma and winter wheat production seems a long ways away. However, it is not too early for winter wheat producers to begin evaluating wheat production alternatives. The sticker shock of high input prices has many producers understandably skittish about production costs. However, it is critical that producers reevaluate all budget components for production alternatives in order to determine optimal production levels and input usage.

In the Southern Plains, where dual-purpose winter wheat is an alternative to grain-only wheat production, producers must make adjustments in wheat production practices for grazing, namely additional fertilizer and higher seeding rates. Additionally, the early planting dates needed for winter forage production often imply some reduction in expected wheat grain yield. These factors must be evaluated against the value of grazing. It is important for wheat producers to realize that not only are wheat prices as well as input costs higher, but the value of wheat forage for grazing is also significantly higher this year.

High feedlot cost of gain means that the value of forage-based stocker gain is also higher. In fact, feedlot cost of gain is the mirror image of the stocker value of gain since the same market signals that encourage feedlots to use less grain for cattle production simultaneously provide incentives for more forage-based stocker production. Current feeder cattle prices provide an example. The week of July 28, the OKC price for 574 pound, No. 1 steers was \$116.21/cwt. and the price for 880 pound, No. 1 steers was \$109.08. This suggests a gross margin of \$292.85/head for 306 pounds of gain or a value per pound of gain of \$0.96. At typical wheat pasture stocking rates, this implies a total value of grazing in excess of \$175/acre. This value would logically be shared between the animal owner and the wheat owner. The seasonality of prices between the time of purchase and sale can modify this example somewhat but the general tendency for high stocker value of gain is expected to persist for the foreseeable future.

There many unknown and individual considerations that will determine whether wheat

grazing makes sense for individual wheat producers. At this point we don't know whether we will have conditions favorable for wheat pasture development this fall. We don't know what the purchase price for stocker cattle will be this fall, let alone the market for heavy feeders next spring. However, preliminary budgets indicate that winter wheat stocker grazing margins are attractive and that current Feeder futures offer opportunities to lock in margins.

Over the next 60 days, producers should monitor the possibilities for wheat pasture production and the feasibility of wheat pasture grazing. High input costs and market volatility are not for the faint of heart but there is opportunity in changing markets. It is essential that producers (and their lenders) thoroughly evaluate possibilities starting with a blank sheet of paper. Old rules of thumb are very dangerous in today's markets.

Wheat & Canola Meeting

Thursday, August 21st – 7:30 A.M.
Blaine County Fairgrounds
Foley Building - Watonga, OK



Speakers

Roger Gribble, OSU N.W. Area Agronomist
Specialist

Heath Sanders, OSU Extension Canola Specialist

Topics:

Wheat Varieties
Seed Treatments
Fertilizer
Winter Canola

(Coffee and donuts will be served)

Wheat Profitability: Fall Planning Season

Oklahoma farmers and ranchers are preparing for the new crop year, stocker calves, handling the cow/calf herd, and negotiating leases. Once the “busy□ness” slows, it is important to make time for the business. A cash flow plan can be a valuable tool in anticipating the year ahead financially and communicating with lenders. This plan helps farmers and ranchers view how money is expected to flow on and off the farm. They can then anticipate months with cash shortfalls, coordinate needs for a credit line with the lender or build up savings to cover the shortfalls, schedule loan repayments to coincide with surplus months, and anticipate changes in debt levels. Budgets help the producer to evaluate the ability of individual crop or livestock enterprises to turn a profit. If an enterprise is not profitable, changes in production practices may help reduce costs or boost revenues. Or, if the plan indicates that this year may be tighter than most recent years, it may be time to evaluate some new alternatives.

When researching new alternatives, it is important to consider what kind of changes in inputs, equipment, management, and time are required. Another item to be considered is how this will affect the producer financially. The producer should know their current financial status and evaluate current practices against anticipated alternative choices.

Help is available for Oklahoma farmers and ranchers wanting to develop a cash flow plan or evaluate alternative enterprises. Oklahoma Cooperative Extension’s special program, Intensive Financial Management and Planning Support (IFMAPS), provides farm financial management and planning services for free. Trained specialists assist producers in gathering data needed to generate realistic cost and return estimates and interpreting financial statements. The producer’s personal financial information remains confidential. The producer provides income and expense information to form a clear picture of the current financial situation. Producer records and Schedule F tax forms are good resources for this information. The assisting IFMAPS specialist enters the producer’s information into computerized enterprise budgets, a balance sheet, and a debt worksheet. The software

then generates the cash flow plan, projected income statement, financial ratios, and stress test. The producer decides how to apply this information in managing the farm. Producers can evaluate alternative plans or scenarios. For example, the producer may want to evaluate the profitability of the stocker enterprise using different sale prices and weights. Or, they may want to evaluate selling stockers in May versus March to see the potential impact on farm finances of different sale weights, selling prices, and acres of grain harvested.

To request free, confidential IFMAPS financial planning assistance, contact the Blaine County OSU Cooperative Extension office, or call the IFMAPS Center 1□800□522□3755, or send us an email at IFMAPS@okstate.edu. For more information visit us on the web at www.agecon.okstate.edu/ifmaps. Lori Shipman Oklahoma State University, Agricultural Economics lori.shipman@okstate.edu

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Editor,



Alvin Woodruff
Extension Educator-Ag/4-H & CED
Blaine County

Wheatland Stocker Conference

August 29, 2008

Cherokee Strip Conference Center

8:30 a.m. Enid, OK

8:35 a.m.

How High Market Prices Impact Stocker Mgt

Dr. Gerald Horn - OSU Ruminant Nutritionist

and

Dr. Derrell Peel

OSU Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

9:20 a.m.

Can I No-Till & Graze Too?

Dr. Jeff Edwards

OSU Extension Small Grains Specialist

10:15 a.m.

Cattle Markets & Issues: Will This Wild Ride Continue?

Jim Robb

Director, Livestock Marketing Information Center

Lakewood, Colorado

11:10 a.m.

Managing Health Issues In Your Stocker Business

Dr. Tom Hairgrove

Beef Cattle Veterinarian, Texas A&M University

Collect Station, Texas

1:00 p.m.

Beef Cattle Welfare Guidelines:

Doing Things Right

Dr. Bob Smith, DVM

National Cattleman's Beef Association

1:45 p.m.

Information for Value: Where Are We?

Dr. Chris Richards & Dr. Dave Lalman

OSU Extension Beef Cattle Specialists

Pre-registration due: August 25, 2008. A complimentary lunch will be served. Contact Blaine County Extension Office at 580-623-5195 or Greg Highfill at 580-237-7677.