



Blaine County Agricultural Newsletter

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Down Sizing the Herd Due to High Costs? Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Cattle Reproduction Specialist

Producers, that choose to reduce inputs such as purchased feed and fertilizer for pastures, are also choosing to own and manage fewer cows. Removing cows from the herd would be slightly less painful if the prices received for them are at the yearly market top.

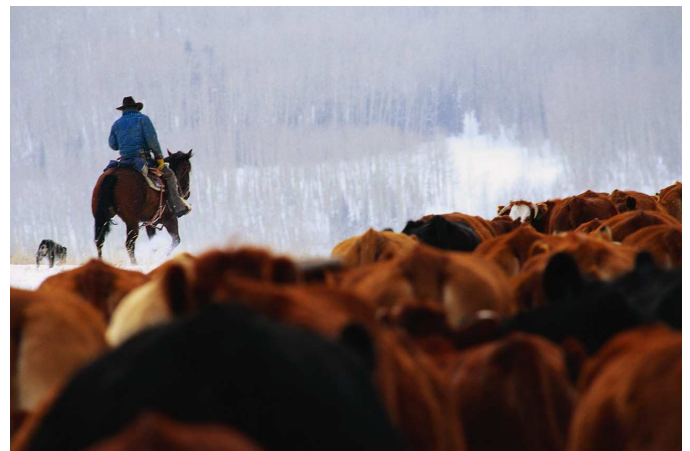
Oklahoma State University Agricultural Economists have plotted monthly averages for cull beef cows in the Southern Plains over a 10 year period of time (1997-2006). Cull cows sell for about 15% more per pound in June and July than in late October through November. Similar information is available at Iowa State University. Cull cows sold at Sioux Falls, Iowa brought 15% less per pound in the fall than they did in early summer.

Fall-calving cows can be weaned in late spring or early summer and culled at the yearly price peak. Fall-calvers that are not pregnant at weaning time would be "no-brainers". They would be high on the cull list during the summer months. Fall-calvers that are re-bred may be a tougher decision, but if herd size reduction is necessary, then selling them now is a better option than later.

Spring-calving cows that are nursing a calf are difficult to part with at this time of year. Traditional patterns suggest that they be examined for culling next fall (when cull cows are the cheapest.) If the forage and feed costs dictate that some of them need to be sold now, then study the market situation carefully. What are cow/calf pairs selling for in your area? Would you be rewarded for selling the cow and calf separately? For example, last week an 1150 pound average dressing percent boner cow would sell for about 58 cents per pound or \$667. A 270 pound February-born calf

would bring about \$1.35 per pound or \$364.50. The pair sold together would need to sell for over \$1021 to justify selling them together. (Prices from USDA AMS Oklahoma City Weekly Narrative Cattle Summary for Week of May 26, 2008.)

It is important to remember that the biology of the cow does not change just because the economic situation has changed. The cow will continue to have the same needs for protein, energy, vitamins and minerals as cows did when gasoline was just a dollar per gallon. Therefore, if we grow less grass (due to high fertilizer prices) and purchase less feed (due to high grain prices), we will need to reduce the number of cows that consume these resources.



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Is the Price Difference Between Steers and “Cutter Bulls” Big Enough?

Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Cattle Reproduction Specialist

Oklahoma State University nutritionists and veterinarians took a close look at the performance differences while receiving bull calves versus steer calves during a 44 day back grounding period. A total of 111 bulls and 204 steers were purchased from different auctions and received at the Willard Sparks Beef Cattle Research Center for the experiment. Animals were processed after a 24-hour period and calves that arrived as bulls were surgically castrated. Health was assessed by trained personnel every morning and animals that met the pull criteria were taken to the processing facility and rectal temperature was recorded. Animals that met the treatment criteria were treated and returned to their home pens. During the length of the trial, animals that arrived as bulls had a higher sickness and death rate than those that arrived as steers (42.3 vs 11.3% and 23.4 vs 3.9%, respectively), and an increased medicine cost per animal (\$12.30 vs \$2.65/animal). Although the animals that arrived as bulls were heavier (548 lb for bulls vs 524 lb for steers), at the end of the trial no difference was detected in body weight (675 lb for bulls vs 682 lb for steers). However, average daily gain during the length of the trial was greater for steers compared with animals that arrived as bulls (3.63 lb/day for steers vs 2.97 lb/day for bulls). In this trial the scientists concluded bulls castrated on arrival have decreased performance, greater health risk, and greater health costs compared with cattle that arrive as steers. (Source: Burciaga-Robles and co-workers. 2006 OSU Animal Science Research Report.)

University of Arkansas animal scientists studied two different castration methods of weaned male stocker calves. Castration of bull calves was done by banding or surgical castration. They also compared timing of castration. Some of the bulls were castrated at arrival, after transportation stress, and compared to castration at 14 days after arrival. Comparable steer calves were used as controls in this experiment. There was an advantage in final weights and average daily gain between those animals that arrived as steers over those animals that arrived as bulls. Steers gained an average of 22 more pounds during the course of the trials than

bulls that required castration. Steers had greater average daily gain than bulls in each of the measured periods. Steers gained 3.52 lb/day during the first 7 days after arrival compared to only 1.58 lb/day for bulls. Steers did not undergo the stress of castration during the receiving period, which could have allowed them to adapt more rapidly to their new environment. Bulls that were surgically castrated on arrival had greater final weights for the entire trial than calves that were banded on arrival. These data could indicate that surgically castrating animals at the time of arrival would not add enough stress to the animal to yield detrimental growth performance. Postponing surgical castration to day 14 did result in lower final weights and average daily gains when compared to surgical castration at the time of arrival. Delaying castration did not have beneficial results on weight gains. There was no effect of castration method or timing for the number of calves treated once for respiratory disease, the average number of treatments per calf, or the medical costs of treatment. However, more bull calves (24%) required a second treatment, which tended to be greater than steers (9.6%). These factors translated into a higher medical cost for bulls when compared to steers. (Source: Ratcliff and co-workers. 2005 Arkansas Animal Science Report)

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Native Hay Quality versus Native Hay Quantity

Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Cattle Reproduction Specialist

Harvest date is a very important factor that determines the quality of the hay cut from native grass meadows. Producers often strive for the best combination of quantity and quality of forage from the hay that they store for winter feed supplies. Research from Kansas State University range and pasture researchers sheds light on the optimum native range cutting dates. They harvested native grass meadows in early June, July, August, and September. The June and September dates were clearly less desirable as the June date produced about half as much tonnage as the early August cutting and the September hay quality was extremely low and produced a hay product that would be difficult for cattle to digest easily and yield little in terms of nutritional value. (Note that this data was derived from native hay, not introduced pastures such as bermudagrass, fescue, or old world bluestems.)

Therefore the decision of cutting time boiled down to the early July versus early August dates. The July harvest produced about 2400 pounds of dry matter forage per acre compared to 2800 pounds per acre in August. The July cutting was tested at about 7% crude protein and the August cutting was about half as good for protein content (3%).

As the calculations of amount of hay and quality are combined, we learn that the earlier cut hay produced about 168 pounds of crude protein per acre and the later cut hay produced only 84 pounds of crude protein per acre. Assuming typical total digestible nutrient (TDN) content for these hays, we would expect to find about 55% TDN in the July hay and 46% TDN in the August hay. Once again we make the calculations to see how much energy (TDN) is harvested to be fed to the cows. The July hay crop produced about 1320 pounds of TDN per acre and the August hay produced 1288 pounds of TDN per acre. Even though the producer hauled more tonnage from the field to the storage area and back out to the cattle with the later cut hay, he moved considerably less protein and energy than he would have if the hay had been cut one month earlier. No rancher likes to haul hay that badly.

The high cost of fuel and labor suggests that hay harvesting should be done as productively as

possible. If we are going to harvest and feed hay, we might as well have maximum protein and energy (the things the cows need) going along on the hay ride.

Wheat Profitability: Seed Treatments

Growers are looking forward to another crop in 2009 following the first year that Oklahoma's wheat has reached record highs in the market. This has created interest in growing the best yield possible. A good start includes seed treatment in addition to proper seed selection, good soil fertility, weed control and good weather will help assure healthy stands and a start to the high yield that's preferred. In Oklahoma we are challenged by seedling blight, root rot, common bunt (stinking smut), loose smut and or barley yellow dwarf. The attached table provides a list of products with their relative cost/bushel and the disease or insect pest they affect. The fungicides listed offer protection from seedling diseases as well as root rot and common bunt (stinking smut) and loose smut. Insecticide seed treatments Gaucho and Cruiser can be added to the basic fungicide seed treatment to provide protection from Aphids such as greenbug, bird oat-cherry aphid, English grain aphid and the rice root aphid. A key disease Barley Yellow Dwarf (BYD) is transmitted by aphids so it is important to keep them from damaging wheat but also from transmitting BYD. Fall infections of BYD are more yield limiting than spring infections so the use of a seed treatment insecticide can increase the opportunity to preserve high yield potential. It's has been shown that commercially liquid treated seed provides better and more even application to the seed and often better results than dry products applied in the field. For this reason it's best to prepare ahead of planting and get your seed conditioned and treated at the same time so you have quality seed with the best treatment at planting time to provide the best start for your crop as possible. An alternative is to apply liquid seed treatment at planting through a drill fill auger although this can require additional time for application at planting. Feel welcome to contact Alvin Woodruff, OSU extension agricultural educator for further information on seed treatments and growing the best yielding high quality wheat in your 2009 crop year. <http://www.wheat.okstate.edu/>

Wheat Profitability: The Time is Right for Decisions

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As the combines are rolling through the wheat fields of Oklahoma now is the time to be making the management decisions regarding fertilizer inputs. This is not the decision of whether to put on 100 or 125 lbs N with anhydrous but how to manage the fertilizer so that every pound of N or P bought and applied is used in the most efficient and economical manner. At this moment anhydrous ammonia costs approx. \$775/ton, Urea is at \$665/ton, UAN (solution 28) \$365/ton, and DAP (18□46□0) is \$1000/ton. Not only is the cost of N is high, but also P. It makes no sense to apply fertilizer without knowing any additional information. The collection of this information is the management decision that has to be made now. Are you going to collect soil samples, what fields haven't been tested recently, how many samples do you need? Basic soil test from the OSU Soil Water Forage Analytical Laboratory cost \$10 dollars. If you learn from the soil test that you can reduce the amount P you apply in a 15 acre field by 1 lb you have just paid for the soil test, with P at \$ 0.7+ a lb and N at \$0.45+ N/lb for anhydrous and \$0.7+ N/lb, the break even for a \$10 soil test is very small. Just remember that when soil sampling take at least 15 core samples from each field. It is also time to decide whether or not you are going to be using references strips this coming wheat season. Are you gong to use an N□Rich strip, a ramp calibration strip, who and how is it going to be applied, how will it be measured and by who? All of these things are better decided now than at the last moment. Having reference strips will allow you have much more information at Top dress time and you can then make a much more educated and refined decision. Not applying any fertilizer is also not the answer, a small amount of N, P, or K can mean very big returns in terms of yield. It is very similar to driving with today's gas prices. If you are at a location where the gas is really expensive, you do not want to buy more than you need to get to your final destination or even enough to get there, but then again you don't want to leave the gas station without making sure that you have enough to get to the next station. Running out of nutrients early in season is worse than

running out of gas. If you run out of gas, you walk and your pride is hurt. If your wheat runs out of nutrients you're losing yield and profits.

No-Till Conference July 18 in El Reno

Producers who are interested in converting to no-till, or producers who have signed up for no-till under the EQIP Program or North Canadian River Project, are invited to attend a free No-Till Conference scheduled Friday, July 18th, at the Canadian County Fairgrounds Education Building in El Reno. Lunch and education materials are also provided at no charge.

Speakers from the OSU Extension Service, OSU and the Oklahoma Conversation Commission will be addressing such topics as well control, equipment, crop rotations and the pros and cons of conventional tillage vs. no-till. Also invited to speak is a representative from the Okla. Conversation Commission who will present information on carbon crediting trading and carbon sequestration, a potential component of no-till conversion.

Sponsors of the workshop are the Canadian County OSU Extension and Central North Canadian River Conservation. Meal sponsors are Plains Partner's Grains of Okarche and Bayer Crop Science. Break sponsor is Chisholm Trail Farm Credit of Chickasha.

If you plan to attend, contact the Central North Canadian River Conservation District, 405-884-2383 by July 15th to make reservations in order to ensure adequate seating and meal count.