MCCA Meeting Set

The McCurtain County Cattleman’s Association will meet Thursday, January 22nd, at the Kiamichi Technology Center in Idabel. The meeting will begin at 6:00 p.m.

The association will be providing Chili and fixings for the meal and all member families are asked to bring your favorite desert.

The educational presentation will be on IRS regulations related to the farm and in particular, what records need to be maintained to prevent your operation to be deemed a “Hobby” rather than a business. I hope this will be a timely presentation as we all begin to get our stuff together to prepare tax forms this spring.

We will also be conducting our annual meeting and board of directors elections and will possibly have some speech from our 4-H and/or FFA members.

If you’re not a member of the MCCA, come out and join us for an evening of fellowship and education. You’re not obligated to join by attending.

Beef Quality Assurance Training Set for February 5th

The McCurtain County Extension Office will host a Beef Quality Assurance Training Thursday, February 5th, at the Kiamichi Technology Center in Idabel. A free meal sponsored by the Oklahoma Beef Council will be served at 6:00 p.m. and the program will run from 6:30—9:30 p.m.

Oklahoma Beef Quality Assurance (OBQA) is part of a national program that provides guidelines for beef cattle production. The program raises consumer confidence through offering proper management techniques and a commitment to quality within every segment of the beef industry.

The centerpiece of BQA lies in formal certification according to a set of national BQA standards. Increasingly, buyers of feeder calves and breeding stock are seeking out sources of livestock from BQA certified operations and individuals. In some cases, cattle eligible marketing programs must come from BQA certified operations. By applying BQA certified practices and standards, producers are opening up a market outlet for those progressive beef cattle producers who become certified.

Upon successful completion of the BQA course, and successful completion of an exam, producers will:

- Be recognized as a BQA Certified Producer published on the Oklahoma Beef Quality Assurance website.
- Be supplied a BQA certification card and certification number.
- Meet the requirements for other state and national production and marketing programs that require BQA certification.

Attendance for this meeting will be limited to the first 40 producers. Please assist us by calling the Extension Office at 286-7558 no later than January 23rd to enroll. We hope to see you there.
OSU Launches beefextension.com

Cattle producers now have a new tool in their “resource toolbox”. Oklahoma State University extension animal scientists have launched a new educational website designed to be a “one-stop shopping” destination for Oklahoma beef cattle producers. The website is www.beefextension.com and contains access to many useful pieces of information for cow/calf, stocker, and feedlot managers.

One of the first features producers will notice as they view the website is the Calendar of Events. This listing of upcoming educational events for beef producers will include links to the registration forms and agendas for these programs. Producers will have easy access to “live” and “feeder” cattle futures markets as well as weather conditions for North Central Oklahoma.

Downloadable record forms for Beef Quality Assurance record-keeping, Country of Origin Labeling affidavits, and OSU decision-making software are also found on this website. The left-hand menu allows producers to choose specific topics that would be helpful to them. For example, a “cow-calf producer” could click on that link, then scroll down the menu items to “nutrition” and find fact sheets about feeding ideas for beef cows.

One of the most useful features of the website is the “search” box found at the top of the main page. For instance, a producer wishing to learn more about “nitrate toxicity” could type those words in the search box and find a listing of all of the items related to that topic found within the OSU Beef Extension publications.

Producers that need more personal assistance may want to click on the “Contact Us” button to locate a County Extension office near them. Cattle producers will want to check the beefextension.com website often to stay up-to-date with changes in the calendar and new educational materials being added.

The “beefextension.com” website should be bookmarked by all beef producers for ready access to a great deal of valuable information.

2009 Market Outlook
BY: Dr. Derrell S. Peel, Ext. Livestock Marketing Specialist

2008 has been a challenging and rather exasperating year for cattle producers and nearly everyone else in the economy. Profitability was scarce for most sectors of the cattle industry as input prices and output prices in turn limited returns. The first half of the year was mostly characterized by sharply higher input prices as feed, energy, and fertilizer prices all soared to record levels driven by growing demand and uncertainty. The second half of the year saw the precipitous drop of the U.S. economy led by the collapse of the artificially inflated home mortgage sector and the resulting domino effect on general consumer spending and business retrenchment. For cattle producers, the positive effect of decreasing input prices late in the year was equaled or exceeded by the decrease in output prices and the collapse of Feeder and Live cattle futures prices.

It seems that most everyone is ready to close the books on 2008 and move on to a new year. While there is no guarantee that 2009 will be better, there are some positive signs for the economy and for the cattle industry. It appears that the stock market has stabilized into a trading range, albeit a wide one due to volatility. This at least provides a base from which to launch economic recovery. The Federal Reserve has pumped tremendous amounts of money into the economy, so far with little effect. The increase in the money supply has been matched by a decrease in the rate of money turnover in the economy as lenders have been reluctant to lend and consumers and businesses are reluctant to borrow. Eventually, this decreased velocity of money should return to more normal levels and the economy will be poised for a big economic stimulus.

Likewise there are a number of positive cattle market factors that will set the stage for 2009 markets. Tight feeder and fed cattle supplies will help support cattle prices, especially in first half of the year. Decreased beef production along with reductions in pork and poultry production will support the meat complex in 2009. Uncertainty and risk will continue with many markets expected to remain volatile but, baring a new round of macroeconomic weakness, consumer demand should stabilize and offer some chance for profitable margins for beef sectors. Beef trade is expected to continue as a positive factor but exchange rate volatility contributes to the uncertainty of beef product and by-product trade. 2009 will be a new year and hopefully it will bring a new perspective as markets move forward and past the rollercoaster that was much of 2008.
Prepare Before Calving Season Begins

By: Glenn Selk, Ext. Cattle Reproduction Specialist
and Dave Sparks, DVM, Area Food Animal Quality and Health Specialist

Before the spring calving season gets started, now is a good time to make the necessary preparations that will come in handy when the first heifer needs help in the middle of the night. Here are some tasks that should be easier to do now when there is ample time to get the job done.

**Equipment:** Before calving season starts do a walk through of pens, chutes, and calving stalls. Make sure that all are clean, dry, strong, safe, and functioning correctly. This is a lot easier to do on a sunny afternoon than on a cold dark night when you need them.

**Protocol:** Before calving season starts develop a plan of what to do, when to do it, who to call for help (along with phone numbers), and how to know when you need help. Make sure all family members or helpers are familiar with the plan. It may help to write it out and post copies in convenient places. Talk to the local veterinarian about the protocol and incorporate his/her suggestions. Your veterinarian will be a lot more helpful when you have an emergency during the kids’ school program if you have talked a few times during regular hours.

**Lubrication:** Purchase or locate lubricants to use on the obstetrical sleeves. Many different lubricants have been used and one of the best lubricants is probably the simplest – non-detergent soap and warm water.

**Supplies:** The stockman should always have in his medicine chest the following: disposable obstetrical sleeves, non-irritant antiseptic, lubricant, obstetrical chains (60 inch and/or two 30 inch chains), two obstetrical handles, mechanical calf pullers, and injectable antibiotics. Do not forget the simple things like a good flashlight with extra batteries and some old towels or a roll of paper towels. It may be helpful for you to have all these things and other items you may want to include packed into a 5 gallon bucket to make up an obstetrical kit so you can grab everything at once.
A considerable amount of discussion has occurred in the last few years with respect to the use of Distillers’ Dried Grains as an alternative choice for a feed supplement for beef cattle. They have been used in a somewhat limited fashion here in southeast Oklahoma in the past perhaps due to the fact of their relative novelty, and limited availability. However, with the advent of the ethanol industry, Distillers’ Dried Grains have become considerably more available, and at a somewhat more competitive price when compared to more traditional sources of protein supplements for beef cattle.

In addition to the often times favorable price advantage per ton when compared to other protein sources, distillers’ grains usually offer higher nutritive values with respect to protein, energy, and phosphorous as compared to other commodity feedstuffs for grazing cattle. Lest we put it on a pedestal, I must remind producers that the sulfur content may present a challenge in some environments, and certainly something that we must be ever aware of from a feeding standpoint.

Distillers’ grains typically contain 29-32% crude protein on a dry matter basis, which is a level of crude protein more commonly found in oilseed meals and manufactured range supplements. However, the ruminally degradable protein in distillers’ grains is proportionately lower than in the oilseed meals, (for example, 27% digestible intake protein in distillers’ grains, compared to 58% in cottonseed meal, or 64% in soybean meal). While some may think this is reason enough to take pause from using distillers’ grains on low protein forages, oddly enough research has shown that directly replacing more conventional protein sources with distillers’ grains has not proven detrimental to performance, and adding ruminally degradable protein to distillers’ grains supplements has not necessarily proven beneficial.

When energy becomes a factor of concern in the supplemental feeding situation because forage may be limited, or performance objectives are higher than what can be achieved from the forage alone, the energy value of distillers’ grains is similar to or greater than the grain (corn, grain sorghum, etc.) from which the distillers’ grains were derived. Typically, the energy value of distillers’ grains will run in the neighborhood of 92% total digestible nutrients (TDN), due in part to a relatively high fat content of 10%. Based on growth performance studies, it was concluded that the energy value of Distillers’ Dried Grains in high forage diets is 120-127% that of dry rolled corn.

Studies have shown that Distillers’ Dried Grains can replace conventional protein and energy supplements such as alfalfa hay, corn gluten feed, soybean hulls, and oilseed meals, etc., in cow/calf and heifer development programs based on rangeland, crop residues, silages, and hay feeding programs. Studies involving stocker cattle grazing a variety of different quality forages ranging from wheat pasture to corn stalks indicated that distillers’ grains improved weight gains. Supplementation rates varied from 0.25% body weight/day to over 1% body weight/day. Feed efficiencies ranged anywhere from 2.3 lbs. of supplement per pound of gain to 10 lbs. of supplement per pound of gain, depending on forage nutritional value and daily supplementation rate. Efficiencies of gain were better on lower quality forages and at lower rates of supplementation.

At higher levels of supplementation, distillers’ grains will substitute for forage intake. Studies have shown that substitution rates ranged between -0.35 to -0.60 lbs. of forage dry matter/lb. of distillers’ grains. This can be advantageous when forage availability is limited or will become limited during the grazing period.

Bottom line, Distillers’ Dried Grains may be used as an economical supplemental feed alternative to more conventional sources of feeds for cows, heifers, and stockers on forage-based programs. However, producers need to be aware that their use may provide certain handling challenges as they usually come in the form of loose meal, or small soft pellets, and their sulfur content must be known such that their use will not compromise the performance or health of the cattle.
Poultry producers and commercial litter applicators should mark their calendars for the following classes. These are dates for the first seven months. Additional classes will be added in the fall including a 3-hour session in in the county and possibly a fall 9-hour initial training here in the county.

Producers should also try to attend 3 hours of training each year rather than 6 hours one year and skipping a year. In order to take 6 hours in the same year, you will be required to attend sessions with different topics. It is our plan to offer the same programs in the fall as we are offering this spring. One exception is the Breeder House Management topic that we will have here in Idabel in June. A speaker is coming in from the University of Arkansas for this session and will probably not be available in the Fall. Therefore, laying house operators should plan to attend the June session if possible.

Feb. 24  Stigler
Vegetative Buffers to Reduce Emissions, Basics of Odor Control, Breeder House Management.

Mar. 25  Jay  8:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m.
Initial 9 hour training

Mar. 26  Antlers  8:00 a.m.—Noon
1st 1/2 of initial 9 hour training

Mar. 26  Miami  6:00—9:00 p.m.
On-Farm Composting, Vegetative Buffers to Reduce Emissions, Breeder House Management

Apr. 2  Antlers  8:00 a.m.—Noon
2nd 1/2 of initial 9 hour training

Apr. 16  Jay  6:00 p.m.—9:00 p.m.
Forage Management

Apr. 30  Adair County
On-Farm composting, Vegetative Buffers to reduce emissions, Weed ID and the Effects of Overgrazing

Jun. 4  Poteau  9 a.m.—Noon
Breeder House Management, Vegetative Buffers to Reduce Emissions, Subsurface Technology for applying litter

Jun. 4  Idabel  6:00 p.m.—9:00 p.m.
Breeder House Management, Vegetative Buffers to Reduce Emissions, Scenarios that alter poultry litter nutrient availability

Jun. 13  Stigler  8:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m.
Initial 9 hour training

Jul. 7  Tahlequah  6:00 p.m.—9:00 p.m.
Scenarios that alter poultry litter nutrient availability, On-Farm Composting

Producers needing to check on their hours or with other questions can contact the McCurtain County Extension Office at 580-286-7558. However, the Department of Agriculture is the only organization that can determine if producers are within compliance or not. The Extension Service can only confirm that you have attended the training.

These dates are tentative at this time. Producers and applicators should receive a mailing from OSU in the coming weeks with all dates and locations confirmed.
It has been a dry fall and winter for a large portion of Southeast Oklahoma this year. Forages such as fescue and ryegrass have not faired well, and the coming spring may end up being one of those where we are forced to feed large quantities of hay and supplement into early April. If you do have a decent stand of fescue or ryegrass, you may want to consider fertilizing it this spring in order to reduce the cost of feeding in March and April.

Many of the pastures that were planted to ryegrass, or traditionally have ryegrass stands, may look somewhat thin in plant populations. If you really get out there and look closely, some of them have 3 or 4 plants per square foot. These plants are extremely small and are hanging on by a thread, but they are still green. With better weather and a little fertility, it may still be possible to make a decent forage crop of ryegrass in early March and April. You just need to get out there and take a close look.

Ryegrass, when given the right fertility and some rainfall has the ability to produce many tillers that grow into quite a bit of forage and can cover a lot of bare ground. A tiller is just a stem that grows from the crown of the plant and produces leaves, stems and seed heads. A ryegrass plant that has 5 to 6 of these tillers can produce a lot of forage! To determine if it is worth the expense to apply fertility to the pasture, an easy method of determining plant populations is to use a white wire coat hanger and actually go out and count ryegrass plants. The inside of a wire coat hanger is about .5 square feet. If we throw the coat hanger on the ground and there are 4 small ryegrass plants inside the wire, we would have about 8 plants per square foot. If you have less than 3 ryegrass plants inside the coat hanger (6 plants per square foot) it may be better to save your fertilizer dollar for bermudagrass production. If on the other hand you have 3 or more plants inside the coat hanger, it may well be worth the cost of fertility to produce enough ryegrass to reduce feeding costs in late March and April. When using this method to make counts, it is important that you take counts across the whole pasture. Drive a pickup or ATV across the pasture and throw the coat hanger down in at least 20 places. Write down the number of plants in each count, add them together and divide by 20 and multiply by 2. This will give the average plants per square foot for the pasture. If its 5 or 6 plants per square foot, adding nitrogen fertility may be worth the expense in reduce feeding costs. If its 1 to 3 plants per square foot, you may want to save those fertilizer dollars for use later in the spring for bermudagrass production.

Ryegrass can look a whole lot like other winter grasses that do not respond to fertility as well as ryegrass does. It is pretty easy to tell them apart if you look closely. Most of our annual bromes (winter grasses) will have hairs somewhere on the plant. It may be on the leaf blades, or it may be where the leaf meets the stem or it could be on the collar around the stem. If the plant has any hairs on it anywhere, it is not ryegrass. Ryegrass will have a shiny appearance when in bright sunshine and there will be no hairs on the plant. This makes it easy to identify if you look closely.

A similar process can be used to determine if fertilizing fescue will pay off. Fescue, being a perennial plant, will have large crowns that can cover quite a bit of area. Instead of counting plants, when we throw our coat hanger down, we will estimate ground cover. If the green fescue plant covers 25% of the area inside the coat hanger, we would write this down. After taking 20 observations across the field, we would add up all the numbers and divide by 20. This would give us the average percent ground cover of fescue for the pasture. If this number is above 25%, you should consider applying a fertility treatment. If the average is less than 25%, you may want to save those fertilizer dollars for later in the year.

Nitrogen fertilizer prices have come down in the past months and applying 130 lb per acre of Urea in February could easily result in a ton of forage production this spring. If you have the ryegrass plant populations needed or the fescue ground cover needed, consider fertilizing them to reduce your spring feeding costs.
Garden Tips for February

General
• Base any plant fertilization on a soil test. For directions, contact your county Extension Educator.
• Provide feed and unfrozen water for your feathered friends.
• Clean up birdhouses before spring tenants arrive during the middle of this month.
• Avoid salting sidewalks for damage can occur to plant material. Use alternative commercial products, sand or kitty litter for traction.

Trees & Shrubs
• Fertilize trees, including fruit and nut trees and shrubs, annually. (F-6412)
• Most bare-rooted trees and shrubs should be planted in February or March. (F-6414)
• Finish pruning shade trees, summer flowering shrubs and hedges. Spring blooming shrubs such as forsythia may be pruned immediately after flowering. Do not top trees or prune just for the sake of pruning. (F-6409)
• Look for arborvitae aphids on many evergreen shrubs during the warmer days of early spring.
• Gall-producing insects on oaks, pecans, hackberries, etc. need to be sprayed prior to bud break of foliage.
• Dormant oil can still be applied to control mites, galls, overwintering aphids, etc. (F-7306)

Fruit & Nuts
• Spray peaches and nectarines with a fungicide for prevention of peach leaf curl before bud swell. (F-7319)
• Mid-February is a good time to begin pruning and fertilizing trees and small fruits.
• Collect and store graftwood for grafting pecans later this spring.
• Begin planting blackberries, raspberries, strawberries, grapes, asparagus and other perennial garden crops later this month.
• Choose fruit varieties that have a proven track record for Oklahoma's conditions (F-6222 has a recommended list).

Turf
• A product containing glyphosate plus a broadleaf herbicide can be used on dormant bermuda in January or February when temperatures are above 50°F for winter weed control. (F-6421)

Vegetables
• Cool-season vegetable transplants can still be started for late spring garden planting.
• By February 15 many cool-season vegetables like cabbage, carrots, lettuce, peas and potatoes can be planted. (F-6004)

Flowers
• Force spring flowering branches like forsythia, quince, peach, apple and weigela for early bloom indoors.
• Forced spring bulbs should begin to bloom indoors. Many need 10-12 weeks of cold, dark conditions prior to blooming.
• Feed tulips in early February.
• Wait to prune roses in March.
Credit markets are in trouble and reportedly financial institutions aren’t loaning out funds they have. So, will there be loan money available for agriculture?

In a recent webinar hosted by DTN Dr. David Kohl, Virginia Tech Professor Emeritus, “What to Do about Financial Fallout”, assured viewers that agricultural loans will continue to be made. Here are some additional thoughts from Brian Briggeman, OSU Assistant Professor, and Damona Doye...

The health of agricultural credit markets is dependent on the financial condition of both agricultural producer/borrowers and lending institutions. USDA data suggest that the farm debt relative to assets in real terms is relatively low. While certainly there may be pockets of farm financial stress caused by local production calamities, in general, farmers are not as highly leveraged as they were during the agricultural crisis of the early 1980s. Low debt levels mean unused borrowing capacity that can be tapped into when needed. High crop and livestock prices allowed producers to pay back loans at record high rates early in the year. However, when preparations were beginning for fall crops, high input prices led to an increase in loan demand (see the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City’s second quarter Agricultural Credit Survey at http://www.kc.frb.org/Agcrsrv/AGCR2Q08.pdf). With high costs of production, profit margins are expected to be squeezed dramatically in the coming year as expected crop prices are well below last year’s record high prices. This will likely cause loan repayment to be slowed in coming quarters.

Agricultural credit comes from two primary sources, commercial banks and the Farm Credit System. In 2007, on average, they provided more than 80% of real estate and non-real estate farm debt nationwide. Life insurance companies hold an additional 10% of farm real estate debt and other various institutions and government agencies supply the remaining amount of agricultural credit. Thus, the availability of credit depends on the financial position of these institutions. Commercial banks loan funds generally come from local deposits so general economic conditions can be expected to impact fund availability. Oklahoma’s economy has performed well relative to the rest of the nation, thanks in part to oil and gas revenues. The Oklahoma Bankers Association states that Oklahoma banks are in good financial condition because they avoided many of the investments and lending practices that have caused many problems for other banks on the coasts. The Farm Credit System is also in good financial condition because of their strong capital levels and the recent injection of capital into Farmer Mac.

Many of today’s agricultural lenders lived through the farm financial crisis of the 1980’s and have avoided making risky loans like those currently going bad in other sectors. Agricultural lenders may be even more cautious in coming months. Credit recipients have the burden to show their ability to make timely loan payments, which, of course, Quicken users are well-prepared to do with their good record-keeping systems, assuming product markets cooperate with reasonable commodity prices.

If you are starting to feel a pinch, don’t wait until problems become a crisis to take action. Make sure decisions are based on the best available information and weigh risks associated with assumptions being wrong. You may be able to improve your business financial outlook by tweaking either production or financial management practices. Cost control, improved marketing skills, insurance protection, and adjusting your enterprise mix can all help in both the short run and longer run. Talk to Extension professionals, financial advisors, tax preparers, attorneys, and input providers. While ultimately you are responsible for your financial decisions, outside advisors can help provide objective information for you to use.


And, of course, Oklahoma producers can get one-on-one business planning assistance through IFMAPS by calling 1-800-522-3755.
OBQA Training and Certification

OBQA is part of a national program that provides guidelines for beef cattle production. The program raises consumer confidence through offering proper management techniques and a commitment to quality within every segment of the beef industry.

The efforts of BQA across the nation have been instrumental in recent successes that continue to re-build and sustain beef demand.

Producers who take a little extra time to follow the BQA best management practices can maximize their profitability by commanding more for their animals in the marketplace.

Beef Quality Assurance – Producer Certification
(Certification testing following program)

Kiamichi Technology Center
Idabel, Oklahoma
February 5, 2009
6:00 p.m.

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<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Complimentary Meal</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Management to Improve Carcass Composition and Quality</td>
<td>Courtesy of the Oklahoma Beef Council and McCurtain County Extension Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Processing, Treatment, and use of Animal Health Products</td>
<td>Meal RSVP Call 286-7558 prior to January 23, 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Care and Husbandry Practices</td>
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<td>• Nutrition, Feedstuffs, and Records</td>
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Presenters
Brad Bain—McCurtain County Agriculture Educator
Jack Wallace—Southeast Area Extension Livestock Specialist
Dr. Dave Sparks, DVM - Area Animal Quality and Health Specialist