

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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COOL Considerations for Cow-Calf and Stocker Producers

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Mandatory Country of Origin Labeling will take effect on September 30, 2008. There are specific rules on the definition of retailers and on processed foods (which are exempted) and on food service establishments (which are also exempted) but in general, beef sold in retail markets must bear a label or notice to consumers about the origin of the beef. Only beef from animals born, raised and slaughtered in the U.S. may be labeled Product of U.S.A. Other product must identify the country or countries of origin, which might include the U.S. and other countries. USDA-AMS has indicated that they will use the first six months to help retailers and suppliers come into compliance with the law.

Meat packers are considered the originators of the origin claim but the interim final rule indicates that the slaughter facility “must possess or have legal access to records that are necessary to substantiate the origin claim.” “A producer affidavit shall be considered acceptable evidence provided it is made by someone having first-hand knowledge of the origin of the animals and identifies the animals unique to the transaction.” Records maintained in the course of normal conduct of business may serve as verification. Animals that are part of a NAIS compliant or other recognized official identification system may use the animal ID to verify origin claims.

Cow-calf producers can use a wide variety of herd or calving records, feed purchases, animal health or vaccine purchases to document the normal level of production that would verify the origin of calves they sell. Producers should be prepared to provide an affidavit to the buyer stating the origin and the existence of such records. Producers should keep a copy of the affidavit noting the buyer and/or the date and location of the sale. COOL also covers meat from breeding animals which means that producers should keep records of raised animals used for breeding and should request an affidavit for any purchased cows or bulls.

All animals in the U.S. as of July 15, 2008 are considered to be U.S. origin. It is important for cow-calf producers to document herd size and composition for these animals that are “grandfathered” in under this date. Young cows that may not be sold for several years may need this documentation to verify the status as of July 15, 2008.

Stocker producers, like other suppliers, must “maintain records to establish and identify the immediate previous source and the immediate subsequent recipient.” Commingling of animals creates a challenge but AMS has indicated that as long as a producer has records of purchases and sales that reasonably account for total animal sales, individual animals or subsets of animals need not be traced back to specific purchase group(s). Thus, animals purchased from a variety of sources arriving with affidavits that show that animals all have the same origin, can be commingled into different sales groups and sold with affidavits that verify the origin of the animals.

Depending on the flow of animals into and out of an operation, producers may find it advantageous to use a more detailed tracking system to account for sources and destinations of cattle. Of course, if a producer has animals with different origins, those animals should be segregated by origin group with appropriate records to account for each origin group unless they are part of a NAIS compliant or other individual animal ID program to track animals. As noted above, NAIS compliant animals may use the animal ID as verification of origin. Animals on hand as of July 15, 2008 are covered under the previously mentioned grandfather clause.

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 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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