

# **COW/CALF CORNER**

The Newsletter

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# **2012 Drought Has Different Implications Than Last Year**

Derrell S. Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

Forage production in much of Oklahoma has been better than last year but conditions are deteriorating rapidly. Pastures and hay fields have almost stopped growing in many cases and this means that producers may be seeing all the forage they will have to work with unless conditions improve. Many Southern Plains cattle continue to have reduced stocking rates that carry over from herd liquidation last year and this may reduce or delay additional liquidation if drought advances this summer. Nevertheless, producers should determine right away what their forage supply situation is and determine if and when some cattle marketings may be needed.

The drought this year is quite different from last year in several respects and that may impact the likelihood and severity of market impacts compared to last year. According to the Drought Monitor, there is less severe but more widespread drought so far this year. Last year at this same time, nearly 12 percent of the country was in the worst drought category (D4), much of that located in the southern plains compared to less than one percent in D4 now. The total of D3 and D4 last year was just under 19 percent compared to 10 percent this year. However, at the current time over 76 percent of the U.S. is abnormally dry (D0) or worse compared to last year which is roughly double the 37 percent of abnormally dry or worse conditions this time one year ago. Finally the fact that is the second year of drought makes the implications this year different from last year.

One potentially different implication is the hay situation in the country. Last year, excellent hay production in the northern half of the country supplied the tremendous demand for hay in the Southern Plains and resulted in what is no doubt the largest and most far reaching movement of hay ever seen in the country. However, reduced total hay production in 2011 combined with

drought magnified demand, resulted in significantly smaller hay stocks on May 1, 2012 in many central and southern plains and Midwest states. The widespread drought this year is no doubt limiting hay production again so overall supplies will be tight and with drought concerns over a broad area, hay stocks will be held in tighter hands this year. There will be less hay available, at any price, if the drought continues this summer.

Cattle markets are more vulnerable to short run price impacts due to drought this year compared to last year. Because the drought region was so focused last year and conditions were so drastically different (better) in other regions, the enormous marketings of feeder cattle and cows last year has less impact than typical for a drought of that magnitude. Last year, the ability to relocate cattle to regions of good forage or into feedlots combined with an overall strong cattle market situation kept market price impacts for feeder cattle and cows to a minimum.

This year, widespread drought over a much larger region, even if the drought overall is less severe, reduces those options and increases the likelihood of more pronounced short term market impacts. A few people selling some animals over a wide area is likely to have more market impact than many people selling lots of animals in one region when good conditions exist outside that region. For producers who determine now that some feeder cattle or cows will need to be sold before fall, the danger of waiting is higher over the next couple of months. This is especially risky since the drought is not only impacting pasture and hay production but is also impacting feeder markets through sharply higher corn prices.

In one respect this year is like last year. The drought is changing the timing of feeder cattle sales and early sales of calves and feeder cattle means that feeder supplies will be even tighter later. Depending on how the drought develops this summer, calf markets could rebound significantly this fall. In Oklahoma, this will depend on having fall moisture and decent wheat pasture grazing prospects.

## **When Less Means More**

Dr. Megan Rolf, Oklahoma State University Extension Beef Management Specialist

Hot, dry summer months can create great hardships for management of beef heifers and cows. One way to help minimize stress on the land and resources available to you and your cowherd is to choose animals which have performance that is optimized for your production environment.

It is tempting to think about selection of herd sires and replacement heifers with the goal of maximizing production and the output from your herd. However, increased output has an associated cost and may not increase overall profitability. It only makes fiscal sense to continue to select for increased performance in a trait if the benefit outweighs the increased cost. For example, continued selection for increased growth and milk without regard to the resources available for the cowherd can lead to increased mature size of cows and concurrent increased maintenance costs needed to maintain that larger body size and to sustain higher levels of lactation. This can lead to overgrazing if stocking density is not decreased to account for the increased feed requirement, and an overall decrease in performance of cows and calves, loss of

body condition, and failure to rebreed if the maintenance requirements cannot be met with the available resources.

When nutrient resources are scarce, smaller, less productive cows (those that are smaller-framed, have lower milk production, and smaller calf weaning weights) are more efficient at conversion of available resources. The smaller size of calves can be offset by a higher reproductive rate (due to their ability to maintain a reasonable body condition score), which nets more saleable product. When resources are abundant, larger, higher performing and lactating cattle should be considered, as they should maximize profitability. Selection for optimized performance is not a one-size-fits-all paradigm and these decisions should be made with consideration for each individual operation. Some breed associations and other organizations have decision support tools which help identify sires or EPD ranges that are optimal for your operation based on user-provided inputs. It should be noted that these tools usually have assumed specifications (such as the bulls are being used as a terminal sire and no replacements are kept) that users should be cognizant of when applying the output for selection within their herds.

Optimization of performance within your production system will not only increase profit, but will help to maintain a sustainable beef operation and enhance stewardship of your land. When you choose cattle that are profitable in your environment, you will learn to appreciate the way they look!

## **Effects of Deworming and Late Summer Protein Supplements are Additive**

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Oklahoma State University beef nutritionists studied the effects of deworming and protein supplementation during late-summer on performance of fall-born heifers grazing native warm-season pastures. Forty Angus and Angus x Hereford heifers (average age = 270 days) were assigned to receive one of four treatment combinations: 1) no supplement, no dewormer; 2) supplement, no dewormer; 3) no supplement, dewormed; and 4) supplement, and dewormed. The dewormer treatment (Ivermectin, 1% solution containing 10% clorsulon) was applied on July 25 and again on August 26. Protein supplemented heifers received the equivalent of 1 pound per head per day of cottonseed meal (41% crude protein, as fed basis) for 84 days beginning on July 29. Fecal egg counts were obtained from 5 heifers within each treatment combination at 28-day intervals. Fecal egg shedding was lower in dewormed heifers throughout the treatment period.

Both protein supplementation and deworming treatment resulted in improved weight gains during the treatment period. Late summer de-worming increased average daily gain by 0.29 lb/day. Feeding 1 pound of cottonseed meal increased average daily gain by 0.49 lb/day. Combining deworming and protein supplement increased daily gain by 0.76 lb/day.

The effects of protein supplementation and deworming are additive. However, some, although not all, of the additional weight gain due to supplementation was lost during the winter when heifers received a maintenance diet. Added weight gain that was attributed to deworming heifers

the previous summer was not lost during the winter. Source: Lalman and co-workers. [2004 OSU Animal Science Research Report](#).

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