

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Steer slaughter below 2017 levels

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Steer slaughter continues to run below year ago levels so far this year. This despite the fact that the quarterly feedlot inventories have shown more steers on feed in 2018 compared to last year. For the year to date, steer slaughter is about one percent below last year but in the last four weeks has averaged very close to year ago levels. Steer slaughter has averaged 51.6 percent of total cattle slaughter so far this year, down from 52.9 percent of total cattle slaughter in 2017. As heifer and cow slaughter return to normal levels, steer slaughter will move closer to the long term average of 50.6 percent of total slaughter.

Steer carcass weights have averaged about 4 pounds above year earlier levels so far this year. Weekly steer carcass weights may have peaked seasonally a bit early the first week of October at 903 pounds. Steer carcass weights averaged 895 pounds in the latest weekly data but could jump to a higher seasonal peak yet in November.

Heifer slaughter so far this year is averaging about seven percent above year ago levels with smaller year over year increases in recent weeks pulling the year to date total down to a smaller increase. In the last four weeks, heifer slaughter has averaged just 1.5 percent over year earlier levels. Heifer slaughter thus far in 2018 has averaged 27.8 percent of total cattle slaughter, up from 27.2 percent in 2017. As heifer retention continues to slow, heifer slaughter will approach the long term average just under 30 percent of total cattle slaughter.

Heifer carcass weights have averaged about 8 pounds heavier year over year for the year to date. Like steers, heifer carcass weights may have peaked seasonally at 835 pounds the first week of October. In the latest weekly data, heifer carcass weights were 828 pounds but could increase to a more typical seasonal peak in November. Heifer carcass weights continue to

increase relative to steers. The latest twelve month moving average heifer carcass weight as a percent of steer carcass weight was another record at 92.7 percent.

Total cow slaughter is up 7.3 percent year to date with beef cow slaughter up 10.5 percent year over year as beef cow culling returns to long term average levels. Dairy cow slaughter has moved higher as months of poor dairy economics have pushed the dairy sector to reduce cow numbers somewhat. Dairy cow slaughter is currently up 4.3 percent year over year for the year to date. Cow slaughter is averaging 18.9 percent of total cattle slaughter so far in 2018 compared to a long term average of 17.7 percent of total slaughter. Cow carcass weights are averaging nearly five pounds heavier year over year with more dairy cows adding to cow carcass weights.

Total cattle slaughter is up 2.7 percent year over year thus far in 2018. Increased cattle slaughter, combined with an average of 2.3 pounds increase in cattle carcass weights, both contribute to a year to date increase in beef production of 2.7 percent year over year. Total 2018 beef production is projected to be 27.0 billion pounds, a new record beef production total for the U.S. Beef production is forecast to grow to another record level of 27.5 billion pounds in 2019.

How much hay will a cow consume?

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

This week's snowy weather has reminded cow calf producers that winter hay feeding has begun or will begin shortly.

Estimating forage usage by cows is an important part of the task of calculating winter feed needs. Hay or standing forage intake must be estimated in order to make the calculations. Forage quality will be a determining factor in the amount of forage consumed. Higher quality forages contain larger concentrations of important nutrients so animals consuming these forages should be more likely to meet their nutrient needs from the forages. Also **cows can consume a larger quantity of higher quality forages.**

Higher quality forages are fermented more rapidly in the rumen leaving a void that the animal can re-fill with additional forage. Consequently, forage intake increases. For example, low quality forages (below about 6% crude protein) will be consumed at about 1.5% of body weight (on a dry matter basis) per day. Higher quality grass hays (above 8% crude protein) may be consumed at about 2.0% of body weight. Excellent forages, such as good alfalfa, silages, or green pasture may be consumed at the rate of 2.5% dry matter of body weight per day. The combination of increased nutrient content AND increased forage intake makes high quality forage very valuable to the animal and the producer. With these intake estimates, now producers can calculate the estimated amounts of hay that need to be available.

Using an example of 1200 pound pregnant spring-calving cows, lets assume that the grass hay quality is good and tested 8% crude protein. Cows will voluntarily consume 2.0% of body weight or 24 pounds per day. The 24 pounds is based on 100% dry matter. Grass hays will often be 7 to 10% moisture. If we assume that the hay is 92% dry matter or 8% moisture, then the cows will consume about 26 pounds per day on an "as-fed basis". Unfortunately we also have to

consider hay wastage when feeding big round bales. Hay wastage is difficult to estimate, but generally has been found to be from 6% to 20% (or more). For this example, let's assume 15% hay wastage. This means that approximately 30 pounds of grass hay must be hauled to the pasture for each cow each day that hay is expected to be the primary ingredient in the diet.

After calving and during early lactation, the cow may weigh 100 pounds less, but will be able to consume about 2.6% of her body weight (100% dry matter) in hay. This would translate into 36 pounds of "as-fed" hay per cow per day necessary to be hauled to the pasture. This again assumes 15% hay wastage. Accurate knowledge of average cow size in your herd as well as the average weight of your big round bales becomes necessary to predict hay needs and hay feeding strategies.

Big round hay bales will vary in weight. Diameter and length of the bale, density of the bale, type of hay, and moisture content all will greatly influence weight of the bale. Weighing a pickup or trailer with and without a bale may be the best method to estimate bale weights.

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