Cattlemen thankful for cattle prices this fall
Derrell S. Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

Breeding cows and heifers on wheat pasture
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Strong stocker demand pushed calf prices counter-seasonally higher before Thanksgiving. For the week ending November 17, the Oklahoma combined auction price for 475 pound, medium/large, number 1 steers was $183.34/cwt. That is the highest price for that category of steers since May of 2016 and is $28.86/cwt higher than the same week last year. Across weight groups, feeder cattle prices are generally 17 to 24 percent higher than one year ago. Steer calves are bringing $140-$200/head more than last year and heifer calves are bringing $100-$150/head more. The strength in feeder cattle prices has been quite remarkable given increased supplies. Auction volumes have been 25 percent higher than last year for the last four weeks.

Prices for bigger feeder cattle dropped last week under the pressure of declining Feeder futures. However, heavy feeder prices have been a bit stronger relative to calves all fall and thus remain very good. Steer prices are realigning to a more typical rollback with heavy weights declining relative to calf prices. Heifers, however, continue to have a very flat price structure with heifers from 475 to 725 pounds all priced within $3.00/cwt. last week.

The November Cattle on Feed report was a continuation of recent months. Placements were larger than expected, up 10.2 percent year over year. Marketings were up 5.6 percent leading to a November 1 on-feed total of 11.332 million head, up 6.25 percent over last year. Feedlot inventory growth is slightly higher in the north with year over year Nebraska and Iowa on-feed totals up 8.6 and 15.0 percent while Kansas and Texas are up 2.2 and 6.0 percent.

Year to date steer and heifer slaughter is up 5.5 percent year over year with steer slaughter up 2.5 percent and heifer slaughter up 12.0 percent. However, in the last eight weeks, steer and heifer slaughter is up just 4.4 percent year over year. So far this year cow slaughter is up 7.1 percent led by a 10.4 percent year over year increase in beef cow slaughter and a 4.2 percent increase in dairy cow slaughter. Fed carcass weights continue to inch toward a seasonal peak but remain
well below year ago levels. Latest steer carcass weights were 902 pounds compared to 913 pounds the same week last year. Heifer carcass weights are currently 833 pounds, nine pounds less than the 842 pound level at this time last year.

Beef production is up 4.1 percent for the year to date but the year over year increase is declining. In the last eight weeks, beef production is up only 1.8 percent compared to the same period last year. Boxed beef prices enjoyed a nice rally through early November but have since pulled back with most holiday meat sales already completed. October retail beef prices were steady with year ago levels for both Choice and All-Fresh beef. All in all, cattle and beef markets appear set to finish 2017 on a strong note.

**Breeding cows and heifers on wheat pasture**  
Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Many areas of Oklahoma have grown some wheat pasture for use as winter feed. Some producers may have questions about the utilization of wheat pasture for growing replacement heifers or cows before, during, and after their first breeding season. Unsatisfactory breeding performance has occasionally been anecdotally reported when replacement heifers have been exposed to bulls or AI while grazing wheat forages. Therefore an Oklahoma State University study was conducted to compare reproductive performance of heifers grazing wheat pasture before, and during breeding, with heifers grazing wheat pasture until approximately 3 weeks before breeding.

In each of two years, 40 spring born Angus and Angus crossbred heifers were placed on wheat pasture in December and randomly assigned to one of two treatment groups in mid March. Group one (Wheat Pasture; n=20) remained on wheat pasture (mean crude protein = 26.6 %) through estrus synchronization and fixed-time AI. Group two (Dry Lot; n=20) was placed in drylot and had free choice access to a corn-based growing ration (11.1% crude protein) through estrus synchronization and fixed time AI. The heifers were inseminated on about April 5 both years. Heifers were exposed to fertile bulls starting 10 days after fixed time AI for 45 more days. Fixed time AI conception was determined at 32 days after AI by ultrasonography.

The percentage of heifers cycling at the start of estrous synchronization was 75% and 55% for Wheat Pasture and Dry Lot, respectively. Weights of Dry Lot heifers were slightly heavier than Wheat Pasture heifers (897 vs. 867 pounds) at the time of AI but were similar at ultrasound (917 vs. 910 pounds). Conception rate to Fixed time AI was similar for Wheat Pasture (53%) and Dry Lot (43%) and final pregnancy rate was similar for Wheat Pasture (95%) and Dry Lot (88%). Reproductive performance of heifers grazing wheat pasture during estrus synchronization and Fixed time AI was similar to heifers consuming a corn-based growing diet. Source: Bryant, et al. 2009 Oklahoma State University Animal Science Research Report.

Kansas State University looked at grazing wheat pasture, before and during breeding with first and second calf cows. They compared the fixed time AI and final pregnancy rates for cows on
wheat with cows on native rangeland. Five years of data were summarized in the 2011 KSU Cattlemen’s Day Report. The AI pregnancy rates were 51.7% and 57.7% for wheat pasture and rangeland respectively. The final pregnancy rates after a natural breeding clean up breeding season were very similar at 94.4% and 95.9% respectively. They concluded: “This trial showed no evidence that the high protein diet of wheat pasture reduces pregnancy rate of beef cows. However, because timing of the breeding season remained constant, protein content of the diet may have moderated prior to breeding.” Source: Johnson, S.K. 2011 KSU Cattlemen’s Day Report.

Happy Thanksgiving!!!