

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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

November Choice retail beef prices were \$5.911/lb., up from \$5.840/lb. in October and 1.8 percent above the November 2017 price of \$5.807/lb. However, the all-fresh beef retail price dropped to \$5.603/lb. from the October price of \$5.683/lb. The all-fresh price was also down 0.5 percent from the November 2017 price of \$5.629/lb. For the year to date, the Choice and all-fresh retail beef prices have averaged 0.2 and 0.7 percent above last year for the same period.

Retail pork prices dropped in November to \$3.701/lb. from the October level of \$3.727/lb. and were down 2.2 percent from the November price of \$3.786/lb. price one year ago. So far this year retail pork prices are down 1.1 percent year over year. The retail broiler composite price in November was \$1.853/lb. down from \$1.889/lb. in October and down 1.0 percent from the November 2017 price of \$1.871/lb. For the year to date, retail broiler prices are unchanged from last year. Retail beef prices have remained strong despite increased supplies of beef and other meats. The ratio of retail beef price to broilers and to pork has averaged slightly higher in 2018 compared to 2017.

Retail meat prices do not capture prices for food eaten away from home. According to USDA, 53.8 percent of total food expenditures in 2017 were for food away from home, up from 50.9 percent just five years earlier in 2012. Over the period from 2012 to 2017, at home food expenditures increased 12.2 percent while expenditures for food away from home increased by 26.1 percent.

The fastest growing segment of at home food expenditures was in the category that includes farmer's markets followed by mail order and home delivery. Farmer's markets represented 0.8 percent of at home food expenditures in 2017 while the mail order/home delivery category accounted for 3.0 percent of total at home food expenditures. Most major away from home food categories showed growth over 25 percent since 2012. This includes food expenditures at full and limited service restaurants, hotels, drinking establishments and recreational places.

Beef Quality Assurance Certification for Oklahoma producers

Bob LeValley, Oklahoma Beef Quality Assurance Coordinator

Several beef packers have announced recently that they will be requiring Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) certification from their suppliers of fed cattle. That was not news to most cattle feeders, as most commercial feedlots are already BQA certified. The packers indicate the initiative is driven by retailers and consumers. The BQA program has been in place for many years, so it seems logical that the beef packers chose a certification program that was already established and is known across the cattle industry as the standard for producing cattle that will meet quality and safety expectations. Beef Quality Assurance is a nationally coordinated, state implemented program that provides information to U.S. beef producers and beef consumers of how common-sense production techniques can be coupled with accepted scientific knowledge to raise cattle under optimum management and environmental conditions.

While BQA certification is voluntary for cow/calf producers and stocker cattle operators, it is often just good business. Good management practices are the core of the Beef Quality Assurance program, and often add value to cattle as they progress through the marketing channels. The Oklahoma Quality Beef Network value added program has documented that calves following a vac-45 type of preconditioning program will generally sell at a premium to non-preconditioned calves. We would expect that cattle handled and transported in a low stress manner will shrink less. The potential for bruising and injuries will also be reduced.

Cattle producers and industry personnel can become BQA certified in Oklahoma by in-person training, or on-line at BQA.org. Some producers use BQA as a training program for new employees. It is a method to introduce new hires to industry accepted best management practices as well as expectations for cattle management and handling principles. Additional information regarding BQA certification can be found at <http://www.beef.okstate.edu/> or the Oklahoma Beef Council website <https://www.bqa.org/>. For in-person training opportunities, contact your local OSU Extension Office.

Take advantage of nice weather in December

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

These pleasant December days could be put to good use in preparation for the spring calving season. Now is a good time to check the pens, calving stalls and the equipment that will be used in February and March. Do a "walk through" of pens, chutes, and calving stalls.

Make sure that all calving pens or stalls are clean, dry, strong, safe and functioning correctly. Many producers use the calving shed or stalls for storage the “other” ten months of the year. Now is an excellent chance to clear out the items that are in the way and not needed for assisting the cow or heifer in labor. This is much easier to do on a sunny afternoon than on a cold dark night when you need them in a hurry.

Locate and purchase the colostrum or colostrum replacers that will be needed for those calves that are born but too weak and sluggish to nurse quickly. Some calves born to two-year-old heifers may need additional colostrum because the cow is not producing adequate amounts of first milk. Commercial colostrum replacers should contain 100 grams or more of immunoglobulin per dose. Read the label to be certain. These need to be on hand before the calving season begins.

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