

# COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service  
**February 18, 2019**

**In this issue:**

## **Cull cow prices increasing seasonality**

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

## **Severity of winter and impact on calf birth weights**

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

## **Cull cow prices increasing seasonality**

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

Boning cow prices in Oklahoma in the latest weekly data averaged \$59.50/cwt., up from \$58.00/cwt. the previous week. Boning cow prices have risen four consecutive weeks since mid-January. The increases are exactly as expected seasonally as cull cow prices typically increase sharply from January into February on the way to seasonal peaks in May. Cull cow prices typically achieved the bulk of the seasonal price increase by March and hold close to seasonal peak prices through August before declining to fall lows.

Though seasonal price patterns are among the strongest tendencies of cattle markets, they do not always follow exactly. Cull cow prices in 2018 did not follow seasonal price patterns for the entire year. After increasing seasonally from January to March, cull cow prices began to weaken almost immediately. Boning cow prices in Oklahoma peaked in March at \$67.59/cwt. before declining to an average level of \$58.99/cwt for the May to September period. Boning cow prices dropped further in seasonal fashion with the lowest annual prices occurring in early December and leading to December lows averaging \$47.88/cwt. Those December lows were the lowest monthly boning cow prices in Oklahoma since late 2009. Oklahoma boning cow prices averaged \$58.58/cwt. in 2018, down 10.2 percent year over year.

Cull prices were under pressure in 2018 largely as a result of increased cow beef supplies due to herd expansion in recent years. From record low beef cow culling rates in 2015, beef cow slaughter has risen as herd inventories grew and culling returned to normal rates. In 2018, dairy cow slaughter was higher than expected as a result of dismal dairy market conditions. As a result, 2018 total cow slaughter was 6.2 million head, up 1.0 million head or 20 percent above the recent low of 5.2 million head in 2015. In addition to significantly larger cow beef supplies, there may also be some demand weakness in the processing beef market as ground beef competes with record large pork and poultry supplies.

Cull cow prices are likely to follow seasonal patterns more closely in 2019. Cow slaughter is projected to decline about 1.5 percent in the coming year, moderating cow beef supplies. Both beef and dairy sectors may see modest decreases in cow slaughter in 2019. Total beef production is projected to increase 1.5-1.8 percent in 2019 so overall beef supplies will remain large but the cow beef market will moderate faster as herd inventories likely peak. Current indications suggest that 2019 cull cow prices may hold close to steady on an annual average basis with a chance of slightly higher prices year over year, especially in the last part of the year.

## **Severity of winter and impact on calf birth weights**

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Does the severity (coldness or mildness) of the winter have an impact on spring-born calf birth weights? Ranchers have asked that question during many springs and veterinarians have speculated for years. The debate rages on! This is obviously a difficult subject to research because you cannot have a "control" group of cows to compare to a "treatment" group that is exposed to a cold winter while still running on the same pasture. Therefore research data on this subject is limited.

University of Nebraska researchers have done the next best thing. They have monitored the birth weights of genetically similar calves across three different winters and have related average winter temperatures to birth weights. A 3-year study was conducted to evaluate effects of high and low air temperatures and wind chills during winter months on subsequent calf birth weights and calving difficulty of spring-born calves. Records on approximately 400 2-year-old heifers and their calves were used. Heifer and calf genetics were the same each year. Heifers were fed similar quality hay free-choice each year before calving. High temperatures during the 1994-95 winter were 9 degrees higher than during the 1992-93 winter. The low temperatures were five degrees higher for 1994-95 compared to 1992-93. The greatest differences in monthly temperatures between years were found during December, January and February. Average temperatures for these three months increased 11 degrees F over the three years. Average calf birth weights decreased 11 pounds (81 to 70) from 1993 to 1995. A 1:1 ratio was observed. Although calving difficulty was high due to the research design, it also decreased from 57% to 35% from 1993 to 1995. Results indicate that cold temperatures influenced calf birth weight. Weather cannot be controlled; however, when we have below average winter temperatures, larger birth weight calves and more calving difficulty may be expected in the spring. (Source: [Colburn, et al. 1996 Nebraska Beef Cattle Report.](#)) So far in 2019, 30 of 49 days have been below normal in daily maximum temperature in Central Oklahoma.

Other data that may shed some light on this subject, comes from Oklahoma State University in 1990. Birth weights of 172 fall born calves and 242 spring born calves were compared. These calves were the result of AI matings using the same bulls and bred to similar crossbred cows. The fall born calves averaged 4.5 pounds lighter at birth than their spring born counter parts (77.7 vs 82.2). Source: [Selk and Buchanan, 1990 OSU Animal Science Research Report.](#) One possible explanation for this phenomenon, the changing of blood flow patterns of cows gestating in hot weather versus cold weather. During hot weather blood is shunted away from internal organs toward outer extremities to dissipate heat, while the opposite is the case in very

cold weather with blood flow directed toward internal organs in an effort to conserve heat and maintain body temperature. This change in maternal blood flow may impact fetal growth in a small way, but result in a measurable difference.

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This includes but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services. References within this publication to any specific commercial product, process, or service by trade name, trademark, service mark, manufacturer, or otherwise does not constitute or imply endorsement by Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service.