

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Cattle and beef markets move past spring peaks

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

Fed cattle prices matched March seasonal peaks with another peak in late April but appear to be declining seasonally now. From the April peak just over \$128/cwt., fed cattle prices this past week dropped to around \$120/cwt., the lowest fed prices since last December. Choice boxed beef price peaked in late April at just over \$233/cwt. and have since decreased \$10/cwt. in the past two weeks.

The early round of summer grilling wholesale purchases for Memorial Day are past and middle meat prices are steady to weak with an apparent early first seasonal peak for some cuts, especially ribeyes. This may reflect widespread wet, cold weather across much of the country that is delaying summer beef demand. Boxed beef cutout values will likely strengthen again with July 4 buying commencing in middle to late May. Warmer summer weather should also boost beef demand seasonally in the coming weeks.

Part of the weakness in boxed beef prices is due to weaker end meat prices in the chuck and round. While end meat prices are typically weaker in the summer, current weakness, especially for chuck products may additionally reflect weaker export demand so far in 2019. Latest trade data for March show beef exports down 5.7 percent year over year, with reduced exports to Japan, Canada and Hong Kong while South Korea and Mexico continue to be growing markets for U.S. beef. For the first quarter, total beef exports were down 4.7 percent from one year ago. Growth in beef exports the past three years has been especially strong for products from the chuck. Current forecasts are for total beef exports in 2019 to be quite close to 2018 levels, barring any major changes in global trade policies.

Also in the latest trade data, beef imports were up in March by 6.3 percent year over year leading to first quarter beef imports up 2.3 percent thus far in 2019. Beef imports are up for major

import sources including Canada, Australia and Mexico but are down sharply from New Zealand. Total beef imports in 2019 are currently projected to hold close to year earlier levels.

Beef production thus far in 2019 is up less than one percent as cattle slaughter, up 1.3 percent for the year to date, is partially offset by lighter average carcass weights. Steer and heifer carcass weights are declining seasonally but latest weekly carcass weights for both steers and heifers are above year ago levels.

Calf and stocker prices have dropped significantly after peaking in April. While good moisture conditions implies good forage prospects this summer, cooler than normal weather has delayed pasture growth. Calf prices generally decline from first quarter peaks to seasonal lows in the fall. Heavy feeder cattle prices, which seasonally grind higher from now until late summer, have also dropped recently. I suspect this is largely due to delayed feedlot marketings resulting from earlier winter weather combined with continuing wet, sloppy feedlot conditions. Heavy feeder prices will likely get back on seasonal track as feedlots catch up from earlier delays and feedlot pen conditions improve in the next few weeks.

Wet pastures and foot rot

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Spring rains have filled the ponds and saturated the ground in many pastures. As the temperatures heat up, cattle will start to congregate around or in the ponds or other standing water. One of the challenges that cattle producers may face this summer is the occasional lame cow or yearling. “Foot rot” is a common cause of lameness in beef cattle on pastures. Foot rot is an infection that starts between the toes of the infected animal and usually is a result of the introduction of a bacteria through broken skin. The infection causes pain and the resulting lameness. The lameness can cause decreases in weight gain of young cattle, milk production decline of adult cows and lame bulls will be reluctant to breed.

Treatment of foot rot can be successful when the treatment is started early in the disease process. Most cases require the use of systemic antimicrobial therapy. Your local large animal veterinarian will advise you on recommended antibiotics and dosages for your situation. Severely infected animals that do not respond to initial treatments will need to be re-evaluated by the veterinarian and more involved treatments may be required to salvage the animal. There are other causes of lameness. Therefore a proper diagnosis is important before treatment begins.

Preventative measures revolve around prevention of mechanical damage to the foot. Recently brush-hogged weeds or brush stubble will often be very sharp and cut the skin between the toes allowing the entrance of the infective bacteria. If possible, avoid forcing cattle to spend long periods of time standing in very wet lots or pastures. Utilizing a good mineral program that contains the micro minerals zinc, selenium, and copper will aid in disease prevention. A three year study in Kansas has shown that zinc methionine added to a free choice mineral supplement reduced the incidence of foot rot in steers grazing summer pasture .

Because cattle inflicted with foot rot are commonly treated with antibiotics, it is critical that producers follow their veterinarian's instructions and label directions precisely. Because these are individual treatment incidences, ranchers may tend to neglect to keep the proper records of the treatments. Record the date, the dosage, route of administration, the lot number of the antibiotic given and the person giving the treatment. Then observe the drug withdrawal times completely before marketing the animals that have been treated.

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