

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

From the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

July 1, 2019

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Lower carcass weights moderate beef production

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Total federally-inspected beef production was 12.1 billion pounds in the first 24 weeks of 2019, up just 0.7 percent from the same period last year. That is an average production of 502.4 million pounds per week – an amazing number if you think about it! Given that there is little storage of beef beyond pipeline supplies, it means that roughly 500 million pounds of a wide range of beef products are moving through a vast array of retail grocery, restaurant, food service and export markets every week. It is an enormous and complex set of markets.

Total cattle slaughter is up 1.3 percent year over year in the 24 weeks ended in mid-June. Year-to-date steer slaughter is down 2.2 percent while heifer slaughter is up 7.9 percent compared to one year ago. Total yearling (steer + heifer) slaughter is up 1.3 percent year over year for the year to date. The most recent weekly steer carcass weights were 849 pounds, seven pounds less than the same date last year. Steer carcass weights have averaged 4.9 pounds less for the year to date compared to one year earlier. Current heifer carcass weights are 791 pounds, down 4 pounds year over year and have averaged 5.8 pounds less than the first 24 weeks last year.

Yearling carcass weights have likely reached the seasonal low. Steer carcass weights reached a low of 842 pounds in weeks 21 and 22 this year compared to low of 846 pounds in week 20 of 2018. Heifers have likely bottomed at 779 pounds in week 22 this year compared to a seasonal low of 782 pounds in week 20 last year. Steer and heifer carcass weights typically increase from the recent low to a seasonal peak in the fourth quarter of the year. In 2018, steer carcass weights peaked in November with a weight of 902 pounds in week 47. Heifer carcass weights peaked in weeks 45 and 48 at 838 pounds last year.

With feed costs destined to be somewhat higher in the second half of the year, feedlots will have some incentive to trim back days on feed suggesting lighter finished and, thus, carcass weights. However, feedlots do this largely by placing heavier feeder cattle, which need fewer

days to finish. Heavier placement weights imply heavier finish weights. Feedlot data shows that every one pound increase in placement weight results in about one-half pound increase in finished weight. Thus, the impact of higher feed prices on carcass weights is unclear but is unlikely to have a major impact.

Assuming carcass weights remain at or below last year's levels for the remainder of the year, beef production is expected to total just over one percent higher year over year for 2019. As long as beef demand does not weaken appreciably in the remainder of the year, fed cattle prices are expected to average about equal to 2018 levels for an annual average. Fed prices are expected to be slightly lower year over year in the third quarter before strengthening in the fourth quarter. Feeder prices are generally expected to average three to five percent below 2018 levels for the remainder of the year and for an annual average.

Mid to late summer supplementation for fall-born replacement heifers

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Fall born replacement heifers have been (or soon will be) weaned and will be at a very critical growing period. It is important that they grow at about 1.5 pounds per day from weaning until the start of the breeding season. Currently summer pastures are green, growing, and adequate in protein content. However, warm season pastures such as native grass or bermudagrass can be expected to be declining in forage quality in the hot, dry days of July, August, and September. Also these grasses will be reaching plant maturity which accelerates the decline in protein content.

To expect a very high percentage (greater than 90%) to be cycling at the start of the breeding season, the heifers need to be at least 60% of their mature weight. Therefore, the young heifers must receive supplemental protein to continue to grow at the necessary pace of 1.5 pounds per head per day going into their first breeding season. An economical solution would be to give these heifers 1 pound per head per day of the protein supplement called [Oklahoma Gold](#). This is an OSU-developed protein supplement scheme that consists of a high protein (38% - 45%) pellet that contains the label-recommended dosage of one of the ionophores. Ionophores are feed additives (monensin or lasalocid) that improve feed utilization, inhibit coccidiosis, and enhance the onset of puberty in growing heifers. Research from Texas A&M in the 1970's indicated that heifers receiving an ionophore reached puberty about 2 weeks earlier than counterparts that did not receive an ionophore. Inclusion of the ionophore in the growing program should cause a few more heifers to be cycling early in the breeding season. The Oklahoma Gold program for stocker cattle is used in conjunction with growth promoting implants. However, do NOT implant weaned heifers intended for replacements.

The protein supplement will allow microbial digestion of the average quality late summer forage which in turn provides the energy needed to support the desired amount of gain. If forage quantity is very limited, the protein supplement alone will not produce adequate gains. In this

scenario, a rancher first needs to decide if keeping more replacement heifers is really in his or her best interest.

Light-weight or young, weaned heifers that need an added boost while still on late summer pasture may benefit more from the [Oklahoma Super Gold](#) supplementation program. "Super Gold" consists of feeding 2.5 pounds per head per day of a 25% crude protein pellet. Once again, an ionophore is included at the proper dosage and will be beneficial to these young growing heifers. Supplements such as Oklahoma Super Gold can be purchased or manufactured to include antibiotics such as aureomycin. These supplements must be prescribed by a veterinarian and have an accompanying Veterinary Feed Directive in order to be mixed and fed. Plan ahead for late summer supplementation of fall-born replacement heifers.

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