COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Feedlots place more and lighter cattle

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The latest Cattle on Feed report showed a September 1 feedlot inventory of 11.125 million head, a record for the month since the current data series began in 1996. The September 1 inventory was 105.9 percent of one year ago. A twelve month moving average of monthly feedlot inventories shows that, over the last year, feedlots have had the largest average feedlot total since 2007. August marketings were even with year earlier levels, and equal to pre-report estimates.

August placements were larger than average pre-report estimates at 107.4 percent of last year. However, some analysts anticipated a placement total this large. Increased August placements largely consisted of cattle under 700 pounds, with the under 600 pound category up 19.4 percent year over year and cattle placed weighing 600-700 pounds were up 17.5 percent compared to last year. In fact, lightweight placements have dominated total feedlot placements since May. In the last four months, placements of cattle under 700 pounds has been up 13.2 percent year over year, while placements weighing over 700 pounds were down 1.0 percent year over year. Lightweight feedlot placements likely include lighter weight steer placements as well as continued high proportions of heifers in the feedlot total. Heifers are typically placed 50-100 pounds lighter in weight compared to steers. Lightweight placements since May will result in lighter and later fed marketings and may contribute to relatively tighter fed cattle supplies for the remainder of the year.

Total cattle slaughter is up 3.2 percent for the year to date, led by aggressive female slaughter. Heifer slaughter is up 8.3 percent year over year for the year to date. However, heifer slaughter is expected to show much smaller year over year increases in the fourth quarter, thereby moderating the annual increase. Beef cow slaughter is 11.4 percent larger year over year so far this year. Dairy cow slaughter continues to inch higher and is up 4.5 percent so far this year. Steer slaughter continues below year ago levels and is down 0.8 percent year over year for

the year to date. Steer slaughter will likely increase some relative to last year and result in an annual total slightly larger than last year.

In the most recent weekly slaughter data, steer carcass weight was 896 pounds, equal to one year ago while heifer carcasses were 3.0 pounds heavier year over year at 819 pounds and cow carcass weights were 639 pounds,4.0 pounds lighter than the same time last year. For the year to date, steer carcass weights are averaging 4.8 pounds higher year over year; heifers are 8.2 pounds heavier and cow carcasses are 5.4 pounds heavier than last year. Beef production is on track to reach a record level of 27.1 billion pounds in 2018, up 3.6 percent year over year. For the year to date, beef production is up 3.0 percent year over year but is expected to be about four percent larger in the fourth quarter compared to last year.

Growing weaned heifers on wheat pasture

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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, 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. (Bryant, et al. 2009 Oklahoma State University Animal Science Research Report.)

Some of the problems previously reported concerning heifers grown on wheat pasture may be caused by the sudden change in diet when heifers are removed from wheat pasture and moved to dry dormant pastures before breeding. Perhaps the heifers are removed from the high quality

wheat because the first hollow stems were found and wheat was being saved for grain production. Also, in those situations where artificial insemination will be used, the heifers are moved to pastures with working facilities nearby. These dormant warm season pastures are likely much lower in quality in early spring than the wheat pasture the heifers have been recently grazing. This sudden reduction in protein and energy has been shown to reduce cycling activity in heifers that are just starting to reach puberty (White, et al., 2001 Oklahoma State University Animal Science Research Report.) Therefore the pregnancy percentages resulting from AI or natural breeding can be disappointing. The remedy is to keep the heifers growing as they leave wheat pasture and go into the breeding season.