



Blaine County Agricultural Newsletter

March 2007 Blaine County Cooperative Extension Service, 212 N. Weigle, Watonga, OK 73772 580-623-5195
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Winter Wheat Grazing is Almost Over in Oklahoma

by Derrell Peel

Oklahoma is warm and windy this week and two things will be very apparent in the next couple of weeks. One is that this kind of warmth and wind will dry things up quickly and it will be apparent again very soon that the drought is not over.

Although we have received some moisture this winter, subsoil moisture is still very limited and surface moisture will disappear quickly with normal spring winds.


The second factor is that we are very close to first hollow stem (FHS) for winter wheat which means that grazing cattle will be moved off of wheat pastures soon. Dr. Jeff Edwards, the OSU Extension Wheat Specialist indicates that some wheat varieties are already at FHS and the majority of wheat varieties will reach FHS shortly after March 1. To the extent that we have a wheat pasture run of cattle, it should happen in the next two weeks. However, I don't expect a large wheat pasture run this year. While most dual-purpose wheat will not be grazed out this year, many producers with dual-purpose wheat have considerably fewer cattle than normal this year. There are some cattle in grazing-only systems that are wheat or wheat-rye mixtures that will be grazing out pasture until May. Much of grazing-only type winter pasture is in the south central and southwest part of Oklahoma and parts of Texas where moisture conditions have been as good as anywhere this winter.

The USDA Cattle on Feed report for February showed that feedlot inventories as of February 1 have fallen to 11.726 million head, 97 percent of this time last year. January marketings were up 2 percent while January placements were down 23 percent from year ago levels. The very small placement level is partly a continuation of reduced placements in recent months aggravated by severe weather conditions through much of January. Some of the cattle not placed in January were shoved into February or will be placed in March as feedlot conditions improve. However, placements will remain limited due to tight feeder supplies (especially limited supplies of heavy feeder cattle that feedlots prefer right now) and high feed costs. Demand for grazing cattle will be strong this spring unless severe drought conditions develop over the next couple of months. Feeder prices will likely stay strong through the first half of the year but are subject to shocks due to drought potential and corn market volatility.

This newsletter is one way of communicating educational information to the citizens of Blaine County in the area of Agriculture & Rural Development. For free subscriptions, contact the Extension Office at 580-623-5195.

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Culling Based on Disposition Helps the Entire Beef Industry

By Glenn Selk

Problems with excitable cattle are becoming a more important issue in the beef industry, both from the standpoint of handler and animal safety and economic returns. Colorado State University (Voisinet, et al. 1996. Colorado Beef Program Report.) conducted an experiment examining the effects of temperament on weight gains and the incidence of “dark cutting”. Cattle were temperament ranked, on a 5-point system, while animals were held on a single animal scale. Their results show that there is a highly significant effect of temperament ranking on average daily gain. Animals exhibiting the highest temperament ranking also have the lowest average daily gains. Conversely, animals that were the calmest had the highest average daily gains. Their results also show that those cattle that have the highest temperament ranking, those that were berserk, also have the highest incidence of dark cutters. Dark cutter carcasses have a very undesirable dark-colored lean that is difficult to market through normal grocery store meat counters. Dark cutter carcasses will often be discounted approximately \$35 per hundred pounds compared to the brightly colored carcasses. In the Colorado State University study, 25% of the cattle that had a temperament score of 5 exhibited dark cutting, while less than 5% of the cattle that had temperament scores of 1,2,3, and 4 exhibited dark cutting. These findings show that animals that have very high temperament scores have reduced feedlot performance and increased incidence of dark cutting.

Louisiana State University researchers (DeRouen and Reger, 2007 Journal of Animal Science Abstracts) recently presented data about the impact of temperament on growth and reproductive performance of beef replacement heifers. They used crossbred heifers that were evaluated for “chute score” (similar to that discussed above) and exit velocity. Exit velocity is a measurement of the speed at which the heifer would travel as she exited a working chute. “Slow” heifers (presumably more docile) were heavier at breeding time and tended to have a higher body condition score. Pregnancy rate did not significantly differ between “slow”,

“medium”, and “fast” heifers when all crossbreds were considered. However, it was interesting to note that pregnant Brahman-Hereford F1 cross heifers tended to have lower exit velocities (at both weaning and at the end of the breeding season) than their counterparts that failed to become pregnant. These researchers concluded that some important relationships between growth, reproduction and temperament may exist in beef replacement heifers.

Canadian Rivers Prescribed Burn Association Formed

A Prescribed Fire Association is a group of landowners and other concerned citizens that form a partnership to conduct prescribed burns. Prescribed burning is the key land management tool used to restore and maintain native plant communities to their former diversity and productivity for livestock production and wildlife habitat. Native prairies, shrublands, and forests supply the majority of livestock forage and 99.9% of the wildlife habitat in Oklahoma. Without fire, native plant communities become dysfunctional and unproductive. Research has clearly shown that there is no substitute for fire. Oklahoma’s ecosystems are fire dependent and not burning is poor land management.

Why do not more people use prescribed fire to manage their land? First, fire was not part of the European culture that has come to dominate the Oklahoma landscape for more than 100 years. Fire exclusion and fire suppression had been engrained in our society for years and popularized by the very successful Smokey the Bear ad campaign. The results of which has been a rapid decline in the quality of our natural resources, along with costing taxpayers millions of dollars each year to fight wildfires and the many other negative consequences of fuel build up. There are four excuses that are often used when people are asked, “Why don’t you use prescribed fire?” The first and foremost is liability. Liability should be a concern but not to the point of inaction. There is little evidence in case law that properly conducted prescribed fires have resulted in significant sums of money being exchanged as a result of damages. Much of the perception of risk is generated by media coverage of wildfires, which have nothing to do with prescribed

fire. The second excuse is, "I do not have enough training or experience." The third excuse is "I don't have enough people to help me." The fourth excuse is "I don't have enough equipment." All of these answers will result in not burning and not taking care of your land. Eventually you will be out of business regardless of your interests. Forming a prescribed fire association deals directly with the four reasons of why some people do not use prescribed fire. You still have to have insurance for liability, but you manage risk by having the proper training, experienced help, and proper equipment provided by the association. You attend prescribed fire workshops, but you also help other association members conduct burns. This hands-on assistance allows you to gain experience and confidence with prescribed fire. You do not have to hire labor, because you now have neighbors helping neighbors. Association members pool their equipment so that no one person has to buy all the equipment.

One person may have a drip torch, another person a slip-on cattle sprayer, while another member has a four-wheeler, and yet another has a tractor and disk for preparing firebreaks. All of this equipment and labor allows you to safely conduct prescribed burns.

On February 7th, interested landowners in the Blaine and Canadian County area met with representatives from the OSU Extension Services of Blaine and Canadian Counties and the Central N. Canadian River Conservation District, at the Geary Community Center for the purpose of forming a prescribed burn association. Merrill Burrus was elected President Marc McKinley as Vice-President, and Dareth Reed is Secretary/Treasurer. The group chose Canadian Rivers Prescribed Burn Association as name of the organization. Membership is encouraged from all counties in the area.

Dr. Terry Bidwell and John Weir, OSU Extension Rangeland and Ecology Management Division gave a brief presentation on the methods and benefits of prescribed burning, prescribed burn associations in Oklahoma, and the hazards of allowing cedar to grow unchecked. Dr. Bidwell and Mr. Weir informed those present that approximately 700+ acres of land is encroached upon by cedar each day, with trees capable of using 30 gallons of groundwater per day, per tree. Red cedar infestations cause a loss of biodiversity in our native plant communities, changing wildlife habitat structure, reducing available forage for livestock,

depleting groundwater stores, and posing potential fire hazards.

. For more information on the association and how you can join, contact the CNCRCDC at (405) 884-2383, Blaine County OSU Extension at (580) 623-5195.

Spring-planted Oat

The long-term effects of the recent drought on pasture productivity are unknown until appropriate growing conditions return this spring and summer. However, there are two obvious short-term effects: 1) little to no available forage and 2) limited hay supplies. There are currently few opportunities remaining to produce late-winter to early-spring forage if you did not plant wheat pasture, annual ryegrass, or fall-fertilize tall fescue. One option to consider that may offer some hope for relief is spring-planted oat. Oat can be planted in late winter through early spring for pasture or hay. Even though there is substantial risk involved with this strategy due to weather, insects, and diseases, it may offer some help for increasing a short forage supply. The primary considerations for success are that it must be drill-planted on a prepared seedbed when the opportunity arises and managed accordingly.

SEED SOURCES

There is not a wide selection of oat varieties available, but those varieties for use in the southern USA are preferable to northern USA varieties. Feed oat has been successfully used and can provide excellent nutrition for many classes of livestock. However, many of these have not been tested as seed oat and may contain weed seeds (noxious weed seeds in particular), have unknown seed germination, and foreign material. Feed oat sources are usually relatively cheap, but they are rarely a wise purchase. Oklahoma state seed law requires that seed being sold for planting purposes have a tag with a recent test result for germination, weed seed, and foreign material.

SOWING DATE

The window for spring-planted oat is between February 15 and March 10 with an optimum planting time during the last full week of February. If dry weather and above freezing temperatures occur in late January and early February, the planting date can be shifted closer to February 15. However, if conditions are wet, damp, and cold during late January and early February, then planting may be delayed until early March. Oat should be drill-planted on a conventionally prepared seedbed at a seeding rate of 80 to 100 pounds of seed per acre.

SOWING DEPTH

Seeding depth can be as deep as 1½ inches, but a depth of only ½ to ¾ inch increases the rate of emergence, establishment, and forage production potential. Forage production potential from a spring-planted oat crop averages 1500 to 2000 pounds of forage per acre. Based on the forage production of spring-planted oat, planning should include N fertilizer at a rate of 60 to 75 pounds actual N per acre after establishment.

HARVESTING

Spring-planted oat, harvested for hay, should be cut at early heading. Once the seedheads begin to emerge, there will be no appreciable increase in yield. Likewise, once the seedheads begin to emerge, there will be a substantial decrease in nutritive value due to the accumulation of stem tissue and also leaf loss. If the crop is grazed, plants should be a minimum of 6 inches tall before grazing. Spring-planted oat matures quite rapidly once the spring temperatures begin warming. Each acre of spring-planted oat should provide between 35 and 60 days of grazing for a mature beef animal. Growing animals (750 pounds), can be stocked at approximately 1.5 animals per acre for 60 days.

PLANNING, EXECUTION, & LUCK

Do not consider spring-planted oat to be the fool-proof solution to remedy a short forage supply. There are substantial risks involved due to weather, insects, and diseases. With planning and a little luck, a spring-planted oat crop may add some additional forage to an already short or non-existent forage supply.

Blaine County Cattlemen's Spring Tour March 15, 2007

Destination

Buffalo Ranch – Guthrie
Livestock Nutrition Center – Guthrie
Cargill Feedmill – Oklahoma City
Tres Suenos Vinyards & Winery – Luther

Food & Relaxation – Fire Lake near Shawnee

Depart

Blaine County Courthouse – Watonga
7:00 a.m.

Return

Blaine County Courthouse – Watonga
9:30 p.m.

For more information and sign up, contact the Extension Office at 580-623-5195

