



AGRICULTURAL NEWSLETTER

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service • Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources • Oklahoma State University
Blaine County Cooperative Extension Service, 212 N. Weigle, Watonga, OK 73772 580-623-5195 May, 2006
Email: blaineco@watonga.com

Limit Feeding of Concentrates to Cows to Replace Forage in Drought Areas

By Glenn Selk

Many areas of Oklahoma and the Southern Plains have experienced a very dry winter and spring. Hay supplies are very limited and standing forage is very short on many beef cow operations. Producers are asking about economical feeding programs for their cattle. In situations like this, some producers should consider limit feeding concentrate diets to cows. Grain prices have remained competitive with increasing prices of scarce hay. Therefore the nutrients to maintain cows may be cheaper to purchase through concentrate feeds rather than roughage. This non-traditional approach is often referred to as "limit feeding". The basic principle is to feed corn (or some other concentrate energy source) and a supplement in just enough quantity to meet the animal's requirement for maintenance or a targeted amount of weight and body condition gain.

Limit feeding **IS NOT** for everyone. This technique may be limited to a small percentage of producers in drought stricken areas. Additional labor requirements, management skills, feed storage capacity, and the availability of feed bunks, delivery equipment and a well-drained lot or "sacrificable" pasture are all needed to make limit feeding of high concentrate feeds successful.

If you wish to learn more about the many important details of "limit feeding" of cows, read Dr. David Lalman's OSU Fact Sheet [F-3028 "Limit Feeding Concentrate Diets to Beef Cows as an Alternative to Feeding Hay"](#). Visit the Blaine County Extension office or retrieve the document on line at <http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-2017/F-3028web.pdf>

Early Weaning as a "Last Resort" Option in a Drought

This topic could probably be titled "What to Do If All Else Fails". Certainly no one ever plans to find themselves with a group of cows too thin to breed. It does happen, however, and early weaning of calves at six to eight weeks of age is an effective way to get high rebreeding rates, even in very thin cows. Although early weaning is certainly not advocated for all producers all of the time, it can provide an attractive alternative in certain situations such as drought or range fires, when large amounts of purchased forage would be necessary to maintain a cow herd through to normal weaning time or when cows are already too thin to rebreed. Studies at OSU show that early-weaned calves can be efficiently raised to a normal weaning weight with minimal labor and facilities. The procedure used at OSU is outlined in [OSU Current Report CR-3278 \(http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-1947/CR-3278web.pdf\)](http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-1947/CR-3278web.pdf).

The Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, disability, or status as a veteran and is an equal opportunity employer.

Calves can be successfully weaned at 6-8 weeks of age and efficiently raised to a normal weaning weight in drylot. Early weaning will permit high conception rates and rapid rebreeding. While early weaning is certainly not recommended as standard practice, it should be useful in times of drought when purchased feed may be more efficiently fed directly to the calf than to the lactating cow. Early weaning may also offer cattlemen a chance to achieve high conception rates in cows too thin to rebreed otherwise. Ranchers that observe heats closely, (i.e. those doing A.I.) will notice that a large percentage of cows "early weaned" will have short (10 - 12 day) first estrous cycles after the weaning process. Subsequent cycles are normal.

Drought, Cattle on Feed and Other Ugly Cattle Markets Factors

By Derrell Peel

Ugly might be the best way to describe how cattle markets look right now. It is possible that markets look uglier than they really are but there are numerous challenges for cattle markets between now and fall.

The drought situation is definitely ugly and getting uglier daily. The brief green-up that occurred in Oklahoma after the rain a month ago (the only significant rain since last September) is going backward quickly after a week of mostly record temperatures and plenty of wind. The Oklahoma wheat crop is currently expected to be about half of normal at best. In most cases cattle are staying right on top of the limited forage growth seen so far and forage will be gone soon as growth has either stopped already or will very soon. Cow-calf producers face some critical decisions very soon as the next 30-60 days are the most demanding time of the year nutritionally for spring calving cows.

Drought forced cow culling has been relatively limited although slaughter data from the southern region confirms increased beef cow slaughter in the region so far this year. The amount of drought liquidation may increase significantly in the next few weeks without significant and sustained moisture. Undoubtedly some cows culled will move to other regions rather than going to slaughter but the dry area of the south central and southwest

part of the U.S. is expanding rapidly. There may be limited opportunities to relocate cows if the drought persists and continues to expand.

The biggest impact of the drought so far has been to change the timing of feeder markets and feedlot placements. The latest Cattle on Feed report confirms large March placements, many of which were light weight, leading to an April 1 on-feed inventory that is 9 percent above this time last year. The market will certainly take this COF as bearish.

The good news is that a significant part of the increased cattle on feed inventory is a matter of timing rather than an increase in total production potential. Increased feedlot placements since November will be partly offset with decreased placements in April and May. Those cattle have already moved because of the drought. An indication is seen in the auction volumes in Oklahoma. In the first three weeks of April, the 8-market auction volume was down by 24 percent from last year. The cattle on feed inventory should pull back down to more manageable levels by June 1.

Finally, cattle carcass weights have begun to decline seasonally and total beef production should moderate somewhat in coming weeks. It will be larger but not by as much. It seems inevitable that it will be a challenging summer with the current load of cattle coming through the feedlots. Feedlot profits will remain elusive until late in the year. Total meat supplies will continue to burden meat markets but the burden should decrease by the end of the third quarter. With a little luck markets may look a little more normal by the last quarter of the year. However, crude oil prices topped \$75 a barrel this week and energy prices will likely limit demand through the summer and perhaps beyond. At least in Oklahoma, it is fairly ugly right now and it could get quite a bit uglier before it gets better.

Harvesting tips for short, thin wheat

Some wheat in the state will be shorter and thinner than usual resulting in difficult harvest conditions. As with any harvest, there is no substitute for preparation. Have the combine ready to harvest when the wheat is ready. A thin crop means that gathering will be difficult. A shorter crop means the header will need to be operated closer to the ground. Both of these items will create challenges, but some minor adjustments can improve harvest efficiency in these challenging conditions.

Adjustment Tips for an Efficient Harvest:

1. Cutter Bar Angle. Tilt the cutter bar or header up so that the skid plates are exposed and the header can be operated closer to the ground without gathering dirt into the header. For common combinations of feeder house length and tire size, the best adjustment is often near the upper end of its range. Tilting the cutter bar up too far will not allow the cutter bar to cut low enough.

2. Accumulators. Check the gas charge of the header accumulator. A properly charged accumulator allows more effective use of the header skid plates when harvesting short crops. Conversely, a flat accumulator will result in high forces on the feeder house and header pivot areas.

3. Header Lateral Leveling. Level the header from side to side before harvest. Check tire inflation pressure before leveling.

4. Reel Speed and Position. High reel speeds will shatter grain while slow reel speeds will cause poor feeding. Operate the reel at a speed that is fast enough and a height that is low enough that the crop gently moves onto the cutter bar. Reel speed should be slightly faster than ground speed. In short crops, moving the reel down and forward will help move the crop across the cutter bar. Be careful not to move it too far forward or the crop will feed in bunches. Make sure the reel is level relative to the cutter bar.

5. Pickup Reel Adjustment. Tine pitch should be adjusted to hold the crop against the cutter bar then sweep it into the cross auger. In extreme short, thin wheat, it may be necessary to cover tines with plywood or other material to make a solid bat.

6. Cutter Bar Fore/Aft Position. Some headers have two or more positions for the cutter bar. If this is the case, the forward position allows the reel to be operated lower so that it can sweep the cutter bar without contacting the cross auger.

7. Knife Condition. Thin crops require a clean cut for best feeding so pay attention to knives and cutter bar condition. Make sure knife hold downs are adjusted properly and all knife sections are sharp and not broken. Make sure that you have spare knife sections available in the field.

8. Finger Timing. The amount of extension on the fingers in the center of the auger is not adjustable, but the timing is. Finger extension timing should be retarded (fingers extending later) for thin crops. If fingers are operated in the normal position, they may not positively convey the light wheat to the feeder house chain. This will result in bunchy feeding. If timing is changed, check the clearance between fingers and the platform floor.

9. Strippers. Check the operator's manual for the recommended clearance between auger flighting and strippers. As you make this adjustment, be sure to allow clearance for the auger runout induced by solar heating that occurs while the combine is parked (especially on wide headers).

10. Ground Speed. With a thin crop there will be a tendency to operate faster in an effort to keep the machine full. However, driving too fast will result in poor cutter bar performance and increase header losses. Driving too fast will drag the crop under the cutter bar before it can be cut.

11. Hydrostat Durability. Operating a combine in road gear with the hydrostat pulled back to a low setting results in high pressure in the hydrostatic system. A better option is to run in a lower gear with a higher hydrostat setting.

12. Adjustments for Low Test Weight. If poor weather conditions persist, this year's wheat crop may have a low test weight and that means it will be harder to clean. Pay close attention to fan settings and sieve openings. Use only enough fan blast to keep the layer of material on the cleaning shoe suspended. More air will increase grain loss.

13. Operator's Manual. There is no better place to find information about combine and header adjustment than the operator's manual. Operator's manuals provide adjustment procedures and troubleshooting charts that are specific for a piece of equipment. If you cannot find your operator's manual, check with your local dealer. Many companies are also putting operator's manuals on the internet.

Lahoma Wheat Plot Tour



Friday, May 19, 2006
Registration 9:00 a.m.

North Central Oklahoma
Research Station

1 mile west of Lahoma on
Highway 412

Wheat Variety Plot Tour

Monday, May 15, 2006
12:00 noon – Meal served
(Courtesy of Wheeler Brothers Grain)

1:00 p.m. – Tour begins

Mike Helm's Farm
½ mile west of Greenfield

**RSVP by May 12th by contacting Tim Darst
at Wheeler Brothers Grain -623-5938**

GARDEN TIPS FOR MAY!

David Hillock

Trees and Shrubs

- Prune and feed azaleas immediately after blooming.
- Insect Alert: (F-7306)
 - * Bagworms on juniper and arborvitae. (Late May)
 - * Elm leaf beetles and larvae on elms. (Late May)
 - * Mimosa webworms on mimosa and honeylocust.
 - * Lace bugs on sycamore, pyracantha and azalea.
- Soak new transplants and newly planted trees unless rainfall is abundant.
- Pine needle disease treatments are needed in mid-May. (F-7618)

Turfgrass

- Cool-season lawns can be fertilized again. If you did not fertilize cool-season grasses in March and April, do so now.
- Warm-season lawns may be fertilized again in May. (F-6420)
- Seeding of warm-season grasses such as bermudagrass, buffalograss, zoysiagrass and centipedegrass is best performed in mid-May through the end of June. The soil temperatures are warm enough for germination and adequate growing season is present to promote winter hardiness.
- Dollar spot disease of lawns can first become visible in mid-May. Make certain fertilizer applications have been adequate before ever applying a fungicide. (F-7658)
- Nutsedge plants become visible during this month. Post-emergent treatments are best applied for the first time this month (F-6421). Make certain warm-season grasses have completed green-up.
- The second application of pre-emergent annual grass herbicides can be applied in late-May or early June, depending upon timing of first application (F-6421). Check label for details.
- Vegetative establishment of warm-season grasses can continue. (F-6419)

Flowers

- Annual bedding plants can be set out for summer color.
- Plant summer bulbs such as cannas, dahlias, elephant ear, caladiums and gladiolus.
- Shake a leaf over white paper to look for spider mites. If the tiny specks begin to crawl, mites are present.

Water Gardens

- Clean out water garden and prepare for season. Divide and repot water garden plants.
- Begin feeding fish when water temperatures are over 50°F.

Fruits and Vegetables

- Plant watermelon, cantaloupe, cucumber, eggplant, okra, sweet potatoes, etc.
- Fruit spray programs should be faithfully continued during the next several weeks. (F 6235).
- Late May is the best time to control borers in the orchard. Check for label recommendations and controls.

