

Through the first week of October, slaughter was about 2.2 million beef cows, versus just under 1.9 million in the same period of 2005, Anderson said.

"And we're just entering the biggest culling time of the year," Anderson said.

So taking the big increase in feedlot heifer populations into account and combining it with the rate of cow slaughter, "you come up with something close to unchanged," Anderson said.

The question for most is the unknown of whether the industry borrowed cows and heifers ahead for slaughter or placement or whether some cows and heifers went to other states with more forage, Anderson said.

Source: Lester Aldrich; Dow Jones Newswires

VITAMIN A CAN BE DEFICIENT IN A DROUGHT

By Glenn Selk

Vitamin A is rarely a concern in range cattle nutritional programs because it is readily synthesized from carotene that is common in green growing plants. However, in drought situations where plants become dead or dormant, the carotene content becomes practically devoid and may lead to a deficiency of the precursor to vitamin A. Carotene is very low in mature, weathered forages, grains and many crop residues. Carotene will be lost in stored hay crops over extended periods of time. Therefore, feeding hay that has been stored a year or more, may be low in carotene. The vitamin A content will be considerably less than when that forage was originally harvested. In addition some scientists have suggested that high nitrate forages common in drought years can exaggerate vitamin A deficiencies.

Deficiencies of vitamin A usually show up first as weak, blind

or stillborn calves. Other signs are scours, respiratory problems, poor gains and poor reproduction. Fortunately, the liver of cattle is capable of storing vitamin A for long periods and frequent supplementation is not necessary. A single injection of one million International Units (IU) of vitamin A provides sufficient vitamin for 2 to 4 months in growing and breeding cattle. *A word of caution: Vitamin A and A, D, and E injections have been found to, on rare occasions, cause a severe reaction to the injection. Please consult your veterinarian about the use of these products.*

Because the requirements of beef cows range from 30,000 to 50,000 IU/day, depending on size, stage of production, and level of milk production, supplements can be fortified with vitamin A to supply the minimum daily requirement. Depending on the quantity of complete commercial range supplement being provided, vitamin A can be added to supplements at the rate of 5000 to 10,000 IU per pound of feed. Alternately, vitamin A could be supplemented in the mineral mix. Choose a mineral mix that contains 85,000 to 400,000 International Units per pound of mineral mix. This assumes a daily intake of 0.12 to 0.25 pound of mineral mix. Variability of intake of mineral mixes may still leave some cows marginal or low in vitamin A. Monitor mineral intakes to insure adequate consumption as indicated on the tag.

This newsletter is published monthly by the Beaver County OSU Extension Office, PO Box 339, Courthouse, Beaver, OK 73932 (580) 625-3464, and is one way of communicating educational information. Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement is implied.

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AG NEWS

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November 2006

WHEAT VARIETY PLOT

The Hard Winter Wheat Variety Plot has been established (10-3-06) on a Kenton Patzkowsky no-till farm located along U.S. Highway 412 at the Balko community junction. Thirty-two varieties of both red and white wheat have emerged and stands look good. The twist to this plot is that it is planted west to east so one has to get in the field to view the varieties. Plot signs will be up soon.

LATE SEASON TOMATOES

The condition of our gardens varies widely this time of year. Some tomato vines are declining with just a few live leaves on the plants. In other gardens plants are green, vigorously growing and continuing to set new fruit. As weather cools and days become shorter, fruit development and ripening slow dramatically. Allow fruit to remain on the plants until they begin to change color. When the first freeze is forecast (which could be in a few days in western parts of the state) harvest full-sized tomatoes that have reached the mature green stage. Fruits will be pale green with five white star-shaped streaks reaching from the blossom scar on the bottom of the fruit upward on the tomato. These tomatoes will ripen gradually over time. Store them in a location where the temperature doesn't drop below 50 F and check them periodically for rotted fruit. If you want them to ripen faster, move them to a room-temperature location.

AMENDING SOILS WITH SAND

Sand is sometimes suggested as an amendment for clay soils. However, there is good reason to be cautious about using sand. For sand to be effective in breaking up a clay soil, sand grains must touch one another so there

are pore spaces between grains that can hold air and/or water. If the grains do not touch, the clay fills in all the voids between the sand particles leaving no room for pores. This is the same principle used to make concrete, and the result is somewhat the same. You end up making a bad situation worse. So how much sand does it take? Normally, we consider about 80 percent sand to be sufficient. In most cases this makes the use of sand impractical. The addition of organic matter is a much better choice.

FLOWERS

Fertilize Spring-Flowering Bulb Beds in October.

If established bulb beds have been fertilized in the past, there is often plenty of phosphorus and potassium present in the soil. However, it is best to take a soil test to be sure. If the soil needs phosphorus and potassium, use a complete fertilizer (such as 10-10-10, 9-9-6, etc.) at the rate of 2.5 pounds per 100 square feet. This would equal 1 rounded teaspoon per square foot. If phosphorus and potassium are not needed, blood meal makes an excellent fertilizer. It should be applied at the rate of 2 pounds per 100 square feet or 1 teaspoon per square foot. Turf fertilizers such as a 27-3-3 or 30-3-3 can also be used but the rate would have to be cut to 1 pound per 100 square feet or 1 teaspoon per 2 square feet.

VEGETABLES

Keeping Your Pumpkin Longer. If you buy your pumpkins early, there are some tricks to make them last. Make sure the pumpkin was harvested before the rind developed a waxy layer to keep the pumpkin from drying out and shriveling. Pumpkins also keep

better in cooler weather, and not the 80s and 90s that we have experienced recently.

Even mature pumpkins may be helped by a light application of spray wax or similar material. Several commercial sprays are available that have been specifically developed for preserving pumpkins. These contain a wax to prevent drying and a surface disinfectant to discourage rots and molds.

ORNAMENTALS

Fall Colors of Trees. Part of the allure of fall foliage is color variation. There are trees that turn red, purple, yellow, orange and brown. Specific plant pigments determine individual colors. Foliage derives its normal green color from chlorophyll, the substance that captures the energy of the sun. Other pigments produce fall colors. Reds and purples are caused by anthocyanins, yellows by xanthophylls, and oranges by a combination of carotenes and xanthophylls. Browns are the result of tannins present in the leaf. Most of these substances are present throughout the growing season but are masked by the green color produced by chlorophyll. Anthocyanins are the exception and are produced after the chlorophyll is destroyed in the fall.

If you have ever seen pictures of New England in the fall, you have probably wondered why trees in our area usually do not color as well. This difference is partly because of the tree species prevalent in New England. Certain oaks and maples naturally produce good color. Coloring also is influenced by the weather.

Warm, sunny days and cool nights are ideal for good color. The sunny days encourage photosynthesis and, thus, sugar accumulation in the leaves. As fall progresses, each leaf develops an abscission layer at the base of the petiole, or leaf stem, that prevents these sugars from being transported down the trunk to the roots for storage. This high sugar content in the leaves produces more intense colors. Cloudy days and warm nights prevent some of the sugar accumulation in the leaves and results in less vibrant colors.

Weather during other parts of the growing season also can have an effect. Heavy rains in the early spring or hot, dry weather during the summer can both have a deleterious effect on fall color.

The length of time a tree maintains fall color also depends on weather. Reds, yellows and oranges are short-lived when trees undergo frosts and freezes.

Stratification - Most woody plants produce seed that will not germinate immediately after harvest. Normally this is because of one of three reasons:

- The seed is immature and needs more time to develop;
- A mechanical barrier is keeping water from reaching the seed;
- A physiological block is inhibiting germination.

Immature seed needs time to complete development and does not require special treatment. The water barrier and/or physiological block require special treatments to prepare the seed for germination. One such treatment is stratification. Stratification is a process whereby seed is given the moisture and temperature conditions normally found in its natural environment. Seeds that are shed in early fall often require a warm, moist stratification period before the seed will germinate. Those that drop later in the fall may respond to cool, moist conditions. The most common stratification needed is the cool, moist type. The amount of time required for stratification varies with the species of plant. For example, apple requires 75 days, red oak needs 30 to 45 days and sugar maple should have 60 to 90 days. All three of these species require cool, moist conditions. If unsure of the amount of time required for a specific species, 3 to 4 months usually is sufficient.

For cool stratification, temperatures just above freezing are best, with a range between 35 and 45 degrees considered ideal. Temperatures higher and lower than this are less effective. The minimum temperature at which stratification occurs is reported to be 23 degrees, and the maximum is 62 degrees.

Stratification should be done in a medium that is moist but not soggy. If there is too little moisture, the seed coat does not take up the water needed. Too much reduces the amount of oxygen available to the seed. If peat moss is used, a ratio of 1 or 1 1/4 parts water to 1 part air-dried peat moss by weight is recommended. When wetting peat moss, use warm water, which is absorbed more quickly than cold.

Small amounts of seed can be stratified by placing the seed in moist peat moss inside a plastic bag and placing the bag in the refrigerator. Small seeds can be placed between two sheets of cheesecloth so they

are not lost in the medium. Larger amounts of seed can be placed in a plastic container or wooden box. Place layers of seed between layers of moist sand or a mixture of sand and peat moss. Bury the container outside so the top is even with the soil surface, and cover with leaves or straw. Alternatively, the container may be placed in an unheated garage or root cellar.

QUESTIONS ON ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

Questions on whether it is best to cut back ornamental grasses in the fall or spring. Ornamental grasses should never be cut back while green as they need time to move the energy found in the foliage into the roots. Even when browned by cold weather, most gardeners will leave the foliage until spring because of the interest it adds to winter landscapes. Early March is the preferred time to cut back these plants. However, dry foliage is extremely flammable and should be removed in the fall from areas where it is a fire hazard.

Another question we often receive is whether we can divide ornamental grasses in the fall. Spring is the preferred time as divisions done in the fall may not root well enough to survive the winter.

FOCUS: DATA SUGGEST STALLING CATTLE HERD GROWTH

Cattle market analysts are revising their estimates of 2006 herd growth after the U.S. Department of Agriculture's September cattle-on-feed report, which was released Friday, showed an increase in the number of heifers on feed.

The September USDA report indicated 4.122 million head of heifers in the feedlot population, up 11.1% from 3.71 million on July 1 and 16.0% more than the 3.553 million on Oct. 1, 2005.

By contrast, the report showed Oct. 1 steer populations at 7.197 million head, a gain of 1.48% from July and an increase of 4.73% from 6.872 million a year earlier.

Through September, many analysts continued to call for the U.S. cattle herd to be 1% to 2% larger on Jan. 1 than it was a year earlier, but in the aftermath of the report most now have joined their more pessi-

mistic counterparts who had called for little or no herd growth for this year.

The bulk of the estimates now run from no growth in the herd size to up 0.5%.

The crux of the matter comes in the number of heifers versus steers that apparently were placed into U.S. feedlots during the quarter, market analysts said. A noticeable jump in the number of heifers on feed indicates many cattle owners probably gave up on their desires to build their herds after a nine-year sell off that ended in 2004 to 2005.

Jim Mintert, agricultural economist at Kansas State University, said he is revising his estimate of the Jan. 1 reported cattle herd size after the report. He now is calling for the herd to be about steady, down from earlier estimates of a 2% to 3% expansion.

Anecdotal and statistical evidence shows cattle producers would like to expand their herds but finally had to begin giving up on the idea for this year in August and September, Mintert said. Drought in the central U.S. withered pastures, and even in areas where late rains perked things up a bit, the water came too late to prevent cattlemen from selling heifers.

"We were slaughtering more cows and holding the heifers, but the third-quarter drought, prospects for higher priced hay and then transporting it long distances (led them to give up)," Mintert said. The increased heifer populations in the feedlots hasn't shown up in slaughter data yet, but he expects fourth-quarter data to show more heifers in the mix.

David Anderson, extension livestock economist at Texas A&M University, said he isn't revising his cattle herd growth estimates because he thought Jan. 1 cattle statistics would show near zero growth.

"It's been this way for several months," Anderson said.

Based on the rate of beef cow slaughter through the year so far, Anderson said he expected the annual total to be up 300,000 from 2005. It is possible that cow slaughter during the first nine months borrowed from the fourth quarter, but he's not convinced of that yet.