



# AG NEWS

**Division of Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources  
Oklahoma State University**

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## **WHEAT PLOT TOUR**

*Tuesday, May 23, 2006 — 9:00 am*

A tour and discussion of the 27 hard red and white winter wheat varieties which were planted October 3, 2005 will be held May 23rd. The plot is located on the south side of US Highway 412, approximately 1.25 east of Bryans Corner. Steve and Beth Frantz have offered this location for the past two years.

Mark Hodges, Executive Director, Oklahoma Wheat Commission will be present along with Rick Kochenower, OPREC Agronomist to comment on the variety trial and address production questions.

## **SUNSCALD ON THIN-BARKED TREES**

Many young, smooth, thin-barked trees such as honey locusts, fruit trees, ashes, oaks, maples, lindens and willows are susceptible to sunscald and bark cracks. Sunscald normally develops on the south or southwest side of the tree during late winter. Sunny, warm winter days may heat the bark to relatively high temperatures. Research done in Georgia has shown that the southwest side of the trunk of a peach tree can be 40 degrees warmer than shaded bark. This warming action can cause a loss of cold hardiness of the bark tissue resulting in cells becoming active. These cells then become susceptible to lethal freezing when the temperature drops at night. The damaged bark tissue becomes sunken and discolored in late spring to early summer (people are starting to see this now). Damaged bark will eventually crack and slough off. Trees will often recover but will need some TLC (especially watering during dry weather).

Applying tree wrap from the ground to the start of the first branches can protect recently planted trees. This should be done in October to November.

## **HOW TO PRUNE PINES**

Pines can be recognized by the arrangement of their needles, which are arranged in bundles. The most common pines have bundles of

two (Austrian, Mugo and Scotch), three (Ponderosa), and five (White) needles. Pines grow by putting out a thick shoot from the terminal end of each branch in the spring. This new growth is called a candle. As the candle matures, new needles pull away from the candle and start to elongate. Pines normally are pruned in late spring when the candles have made full elongation and the new needles are starting to pull away. By cutting these candles back one-half to two-thirds, we can help control the height and width of the trees. This also encourages denser growth. The central leader at the top of the tree often is cut back to 12 inches and side laterals cut to maintain a pyramidal shape. Hand clippers rather than hedge shears are recommended because they are less likely to damage new, expanding needles.

Pines do not react well to severe pruning because they normally do not produce new buds on old wood. Therefore, cutting back pines past the candles can leave a deformed tree that will not fill in. Overgrown plants need to be tolerated or removed.

## **GROW TASTY TOMATOES**

Tomatoes are the most popular garden vegetables in America, which is not surprising. No matter how you eat them – raw, stewed, sliced, sauced, in a salad, on a burger, or in a prepared dish – they offer luscious taste and wholesome goodness. They provide healthy doses of vitamin C, potassium, fiber, beta-carotene, and lycopene. Recent research has linked tomato consumption to reduced risk of heart attack and prevention of certain types of cancer. And just a few plants will produce enough tomatoes to keep your family supplied all season.

The requirements for growing healthy tomato plants are few:

- Give them full sun – at least 6 hours of direct sun per day.
- Plant them in rich soil with plenty of organic matter.
- Keep the soil moist, but not soaked, and keep the plants' leaves dry.
- Feed them with a balanced plant food every other week.

You can successfully grow great tomatoes in the ground (after working in the organic matter) or in containers. If you're using containers, select pots that have drainage holes in the bottom and are at least 12 inches wide. That will give the roots plenty of room to grow and keep them from drowning. Using stakes, a trellis, or tomato cages will help keep the plants growing upright and will make harvesting much easier.

## BORERS ON PINES?

If you see a row of holes on pine trees, the problem is not borers. Borer holes will be randomly spaced over the trunk. Holes that are in a horizontal (most common) or vertical row are caused by the feeding of the yellow-bellied sapsucker. This woodpecker makes shallow holes and then feeds on the sap released from the wounds or on insects attracted to the site.

Other trees this bird often attacks include maples and Bradford pear, but about any tree species is a potential target. Surprisingly, certain trees may become favorites to the exclusion of nearby trees of the same species. Damage to mature, established trees is usually slight and temporary though small trees may be girdled and killed. To control them, you have a couple of options:

- Wrap the trunk with fine wire mesh in the area of damage. This may discourage them if left in place for several months. The mesh **MUST** be adjusted every six months or removed when no longer needed. If the mesh is left in place, the tree will likely be girdled.
- Use Tanglefoot on the area of damage. This is a sticky material that is applied to tree trunks to capture insects that crawl up the trunk. Yellow-bellied sapsuckers do not like to put their feet in the sticky material.

## MORE CARE NOW EQUALS LESS CARE LATER

"Information and communication are the most valuable tools to use in overcoming the unique set of health and management issues presented by each group of calves on stocker operations," says Brad White, an associate professor of clinical sciences at Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine. "Farms should continually evaluate cattle receiving, initial processing, nutritional management and disease management programs."

That's how White summed up his advice for stocker operators and backgrounders attending the Mid-South Stocker Conference earlier this spring. Along the way, he shared a number of stocker-based cattle health tips and reminders:

- "Groups of calves should be divided into risk classifications of high or low, based on the assessment of animals received and on (if available) historic performance of the animal type. The risk classification influences initial animal management, treatment protocols and labor allocation for the pen. An operation should evaluate current resources and match them to the purchase pattern to ensure proper animal management.

- "A specific protocol for each risk classification should be generated for each operation, using the history of disease prevalence in the operation.
- "The major difference between high and low risk protocols are the decisions regarding metaphylaxis, abortifacients and testing for BVD (bovine viral diarrhoea). These choices should be made based on previous farm history and specific signalment of calf groups. The use of an appropriately selected prophylactic antibiotic has been shown to decrease morbidity and mortality attributable to pneumonia caused by a susceptible pathogen in weaned calves."
- "To minimize the effect of adding cattle to an existing pen, try to limit the period of adding calves to three days or less. As cattle become clinically ill after arrival, they typically shed a higher number of pathogens; adding new cattle to pens can lengthen the time of peak disease pressure in the pen.
- "Heat stress is a very real event which decreases an animal's ability to respond to vaccines or compensate for other stresses such as processing and disease challenges. Avoid working cattle when the temperature humidity index is 80 or higher. Cattle don't cool down immediately at the end of a hot day; it may take up to six hours for heat dissipation to occur. Thus, cattle worked at the end of the day or immediately after sunset may still incur a large amount of heat stress. During the hot times of the year, early morning is optimal for working cattle because of the time allowed for heat dissipation overnight.
- "The quality of each procedure performed is more important than the speed at which it is performed. Improperly administered products do not prevent disease, thus the result may be getting the calf up again for treatment, which adds to the time spent on each calf in the long run. It's better to spend a few more seconds to perform injections correctly the first time than having large numbers of animals that need to be treated again.
- "Rectal temperatures can provide a quick, general guide for assessment of pulling patterns. A good rule of thumb is 5-10% of the pulls with a rectal temperature of 104° F or less. If all of the pulls have a rectal temperature of 105° F or higher, then it's likely that there are more animals in the pen that need to be segregated and treated. If only a handful of animals pulled for treatment have a fever, we may have misdiagnosed illness in some of the animals and pulled too many.

"Low-stress handling, isolation, good husbandry and nutrition may be the best treatments sick calves receive. Increasing undue stress in the treatment process can increase the odds that an animal will return to the hospital; taking a few more minutes to perform treatment in a calm, efficient manner can save future expense and labor."

## **ALL BREEDS ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL**

One thing suppliers can do to gain the attention of cattle feeders like Five Rivers Ranch Cattle Feeding LLC (which has one time capacity of 811,000 head) is bring them cattle comprised of the breed mix that works best for them.

"A large number of the industry's cattle are still designed wrong genetically," Tom Brink, senior vice president of cattle ownership and risk management said at the recent Mississippi Beef Improvement Annual Meeting. "Too many have the wrong breed composition to succeed in the feedlots and to satisfy the consumer."

Specifically, Five River wants cattle that are 50-75% Angus, up to 50% Continental, with no more than 25% Bos indicus or other breeds in the cattle.

"You will be paid more for avoiding breed composition problems in your cattle," Brink said. In other words, historically wide price ranges for same-class, same-weight, same-sex cattle will continue to grow based at least in part on breed composition.

According to Brink, ineffective breed composition in cattle is costing the industry millions of dollars as well as competitiveness in the global beef market.

Bottom line, Brink believes feeder cattle value is built in steps. First, comes breed composition, which allows producers to obtain at least market price. Combine that with certified immunity and Brink says the door opens to grid premiums. Add source and process verification to the mix and the opportunity for branded beef premiums are possible.

## **THE BLOOM IS OFF THE CATTLE MARKET**

Large meat supplies coupled with difficulties exporting beef and broilers has led to record large domestic meat supplies in the early part of 2006. Feedlot managers remained optimistic in the face of prospects for weakening finished cattle prices and new concerns about corn and sorghum prices. This optimism was reflected in a large increase in cattle headed to feedlots in March. In fact the 11.8 million head now in feedlots with capacity of 1,000 head or more is estimated by USDA to be the largest April 1 number since the current report began in 1996.

First quarter 2006 beef, pork, and poultry supplies reached a record of 21.6 billion pounds, 4 percent higher than last year. Beef production led the increases in the first quarter, with a 6 percent surge, followed by both pork and broiler supplies up by nearly 4 percent. For beef, the composition of the 6 percent increase came from a bit over a 3 percent greater

head count which left almost 3 percent due to heavier marketing weights. Export problems for beef and broilers also meant more meat for domestic consumers. Beef exports to Japan were cut off again after an improper shipment of veal in January. In addition, Avian Influenza in parts of Europe and Asia lowered demand for chicken and resulted in 9 percent less broiler exports from the U.S. in the first quarter. As a result, there was nearly 5 percent more chicken in the domestic market, which was composed of the 4 percent increase in production and an additional 1 percent for lost exports. Given all the supply pressure, demand for beef held well and prices were not as depressed as for pork and chicken. Finished steer prices in the first quarter averaged near \$89, about the same as in the first quarter of 2005. However, by March and April, these prices moved about \$5 to \$7 lower than last year as supply pressures have mounted.

Large beef supplies remain in store for coming months. In the March USDA *Cattle on Feed* report, on-feed numbers were reported to be up by 9 percent compared to last year at the same time. There were 939,000 more cattle in the feedlots on April 1 compared to the same date last year. Texas led the way with 320,000 more cattle, followed by Kansas with 250,000 more, and Nebraska with 140,000 additional animals. All of the 12 major reporting states increased feedlot inventories, except for Washington State. Placements were up by 5 percent, which was more than the 3 percent increase that was expected prior to the report. Total March placements were up 87,000 head, led by both Kansas and Nebraska which each increased 35,000 head more than March of 2005. Lighter weight calves were popular placements in March as calves weighing less than 600 pounds were up 81,000 head, or 27 percent. With some heifers still being retained to head back to brood cow herds, the portion of steer and steer calves was very high, at 66 percent of all the cattle in feedlots.

Meat supplies will remain large for the remainder of the year. Beef production is expected to be up about 5 percent for the rest of 2006, while pork production may rise by 3 percent and broiler production by 2 percent. These supply pressures are expected to keep finished steer prices about \$5 per hundredweight lower than during the same period last year.

Prices for finished Nebraska steers in the second quarter are expected to average in the lower \$80s compared to about \$88 last year. Third quarter prices may drop to an average in the mid-to-high \$70s. Last quarter prices should improve some, with prices moving back into the low \$80s.

Cattle feeders are also watching the corn and sorghum markets closely. Concerns about the low planted acreage to these crops, growing utilization of corn and sorghum for ethanol, and uneasiness regarding summer weather are all contributing to increased anxiety about the potential for higher feed costs from the 2006 crop.

Source: Chris Hurt, Extension Economist, Purdue University

## THE WORST AND BEST OF THE HERD

*Research has begun to justify culling for disposition as more than a convenience trait, when you consider the strong temperament link between cow and calf.*

Whether you have two cows or 2,000, there is a top and bottom half of your herd. The top half is above average in some way, the kind you want more of. The trouble is, a cow is often above average in one trait and below average in another. Sometimes the meanest cow in the herd weans the biggest calf.

If you cull strictly on disposition score, she's gone. But her calf was 40 pounds heavier than any other in the herd, and she hasn't actually hurt anybody yet. Still, to paraphrase a credit card commercial, not having to rebuild your corral or worry about injury every time ol' "Twister 245" goes through: priceless.



Research in Iowa and Colorado during the last decade has begun to justify culling for disposition as more than a convenience trait, when you consider the strong temperament link between cow and calf. Thousands of steers fed in Iowa during the 1990s and scored from mild to wild, show the calmest steers made \$61 per head more in the feedlot than their high-strung counterparts.

Colorado work backs up those feed efficiency and gain correlations, and shows 25 percent of the wildest-scoring cattle end up as dark cutters, compared to less than 5 percent of other cattle. Dark cutting carcasses may be discounted by \$300 or more.

Just one or two wild-acting calves can excite more of your calf crop and cause the whole lot to make a bad impression on potential buyers. Worried about poor gains and discounts, they may choose not to bid. You could lose in the long run by holding onto wild cows that wean heavy calves, because your reputation is at stake.

You need a way to look at your cows that considers several relevant traits. Economically important traits must lead the way, but some, like temperament, will always be a judgment call.

The simplest approach is to work the bottom end of the herd, culling on a "strike" rule. For example, any open cow gets a strike. If you have a lot of replacements coming up, one strike might be all you allow. Producers must weigh the investment in

her development, and all other traits, against the annual \$300 to \$400 cost to keep her with no return.

Many producers elevate non-pregnancy to the level of two strikes, also culling for any combination of two other strikes. Those may be decided by such criteria as poor udder, mothering ability, thin condition, low weaning or yearling weight of progeny, multiple grid discounts of progeny, unsound feet and legs or, again, unmanageable disposition.

Of course, any one trait can get so far from optimum that you have no choice but to cull. There are five- to seven-point rating systems devoted to most of these individual traits, from body condition score (BCS) to temperament. Using these can help you see the difference between a foul tip and a strike, but you can't see the big picture.

The concept of a multi-trait selection index was developed as a decision-making tool more than 60 years ago. If you have dairy management experience, you're more familiar with the idea, but even there, it is mostly associated with bull selection. Indexing does work great for choosing bulls from among various breeds, involving dozens of expected progeny difference (EPD) numbers.

But for those with individual cow-calf records, indexing the cowherd could help identify and build on the overall best cows in your herd. A computer program will help, but it takes time and effort to devise an index that fits your production scenario and goals.

Look at all the cow traits that are of economic importance to you. If you like something but it doesn't affect profit, leave it out of the index because it will only dilute relevance and progress.

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