

GREAT WESTERN FEEDOUT

The Great Western Feedout is a producer information feedback program that allows cattle producers the opportunity to evaluate the genetic merit of the calves they produce for feedlot performance and carcass value following weaning and a winter stocker program. We will begin the 2008 Great Western Feedout on February 20, 2008 at the Cattleman's Choice Feedyard near Gage, OK, with the entry forms due on January 18, 2008. There are, of course, many similarities between the Feedout programs but there are three significant parts of the Great Western Feedout that are different from the Oklahoma Steer Feedout.

First difference, all steers must be approved through the CattleLOG™ Age & Source Verification Program prior to delivery at the feedyard. Approved CattleLOG™ Auditors from Cattleman's Choice Feedyard or the OSU Cooperative Extension Service will conduct an on-site ranch audit prior to delivery. Producers will be supplied with EID tags after they have enrolled their cattle. The EID tags will need to be attached to the steer's ear prior to ranch audit and approval. This change provides an excellent educational opportunity for extension educators become more knowledgeable regarding age and source verification programs and also insures that the steers are linked to the cow herd of origin to best utilize the Feedout as a genetic evaluation.

Second, the timeline of this test allows the feedlot phase to follow a winter stocker program. The wintering program can have a high gain potential, such as wheat pasture or a dry-lot feeding program, or it can be a low-gain holding program. This allows steers to go on-feed when they are older and at a heavier weight which is currently more typical in beef industry. Given the increased cost of feed grains, providing genetic evaluation along this management schedule appears to be in demand and can provide information to beef producers that can assist them in determining the value of their genetic and management program.

Third, the GWF will be conducted at Cattleman's Choice Feedyard near Gage, OK. Dale Moore is the owner/manager and has been excellent to work with. Dale specializes in small group feeding and has worked to retrieve carcass data for his customers. In addition, there are other changes in format from the OK Steer Feedout; any head-count over 5 is allowed, steers will be marketed individually instead of by producer group, and other minor changes. We hope these changes will expand producer participation.

Obviously, given the location of the feedyard and timetable of the GWF test, many of the participants will be from western Oklahoma, however, we want each of you to know that anyone is welcome to participate. We also expect to obtain entries from Texas and Kansas.

We are excited about this new Feedout program. We hope that by offering a new program we will expand the number of producers that take the opportunity to learn more about the calves they are producing. Again, the OK Steer Feedout will continue to function as usual, providing producers the opportunity to put a set of calves on feed following weaning. The Great Western Feedout is a companion program that provides interested producers the chance to receive post-weaning data under a slightly different feedlot entry schedule.

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AG NEWS

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CHRISTMAS TREES AND HOLIDAY SAFETY

It's that time of year again! Time to begin the holiday season by bringing out the lights, sprucing up the home, and most importantly selecting and decorating that one-of-a-kind Christmas tree.

Holiday safety is always important and we hear a lot about dangers from real trees. However, Christmas trees are not the primary concern. Dry trees can burn but not without a source of ignition such as candles, faulty wiring, or incorrect use of space heaters and fireplaces.

But, if you are concerned about having a real tree in your home provides a few tips for having a safe and happy holiday season. First, select a tree that is still relatively fresh. Close observation can help you make this determination. Fresh trees do not lose needles easily when shaken. Also, pine needles should bend almost double without breaking. Fir and spruce needles should break like a carrot, and not be brittle when broken.

After the tree is taken home, a section of about one inch in thickness should be removed from the base of the tree, and the tree placed in water. Fresh trees can take up as much as three quarts of water each day, so the bowl should be checked and filled regularly. Watering should continue throughout the season.

What about additives to the water? Craig McKinley, Oklahoma State University Extension Spe-

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cialist, suggests that aspirin, cola or other special remedies are not needed. "The best ingredient for keeping a tree fresh is clean water", he notes. "Water that is high in chlorine or other impurities should not be used - just plenty of clean water, especially early in the season when trees will use more".

Potential sources of ignition such as stoves, candles, fireplaces, etc. should be checked frequently. And not just at Christmas time. Fires can occur at any time of the year. Safety is a full-time job.

PRUNING SHRUBS

I have had a number of calls recently from gardeners wanting to cut back shrubs. Though light pruning and/or removal of dead wood is fine at this time of year, severe pruning should be left until spring. Also keep in mind that even light pruning of shrubs that bloom in the spring such as lilac and forsythia will reduce flowers for next year. We normally recommend that spring-bloomers be pruned after flowering.

Shrubs differ in how severely they can be cut back. Junipers do not break bud from within the plant and therefore can only be lightly trimmed if you wish to keep the full shape. Overgrown specimens should be removed. Rejuvenation is the most severe type of pruning and may be used on multi-stem shrubs that have become too large with too many old branches to justify saving the younger canes. All stems are cut back to 3- to 5-inch stubs. This works well for spirea, forsythia, pyracantha, ninebark, Russian almond, little leaf mock orange, shrub roses and flowering quince. Just remember that spring is the correct time to do this, not now.

LANDSCAPING AROUND GROUND-LEVEL ELECTRICAL FACILITIES

David Hillock



Some landscapes have ground-level electrical facilities such as electrical transformers and pedestals. These objects can be quite the eye-soar because they don't integrate with the rest of the landscape.

Electrical service personnel would prefer not to have anything planted around these facilities, but realize homeowners would like to improve the overall appearance of their yards by landscaping around them. If a homeowner chooses to plant around these facilities there are some guidelines that electrical service employees have developed to make it easier to find and access these facilities when necessary.

Do's

- Place vegetation a minimum of three feet (3') away from the equipment's sides and a minimum of ten feet (10') away from the front of the access door.
- Plant vegetation far enough away so it reaches no closer than the minimum distance when it is full-grown.

Don'ts

- Do not place vegetation or materials, such as rocks or timbers, within ten feet (10') of the access door.
- Do not build a structure over or around the electrical equipment, and do not build something that encloses it.
- Do not use vines or plants with spiny leaves near the electrical equipment.

BOVINE RESPIRATORY DISEASE IN FEEDLOT CATTLE VS. FEEDLOT AND CARCASS TRAITS

By Britt Hicks, Area Ext. Livestock Specialist

Bovine respiratory disease (BRD) is the most common and costly beef cattle disease in the United States. Recent research showed that the economic loss associated with lower gains and treatment cost for BRD infection in a 1,000 head feedlot was \$13.90 per animal, not including labor and associ-

ated handling costs. Recently published research from the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center in Clay Center, NE evaluated whether selection for disease resistance is a viable means of preventing or reducing economic losses associated with BRD. These researchers analyzed health records on 18,112 feedlot cattle over a 15-yr period and slaughter data on 1,627 steers over a 4-yr period to estimate the phenotypic and genetic correlations of BRD with growth, carcass, and meat palatability traits. The estimated heritability of BRD incidence was low at 0.08 suggesting that genetic selection for reduced BRD incidence would be slow at best. In contrast, heritability estimates for carcass traits were moderate to high, ranging from 0.26 to 0.68. Heritability estimates for palatability traits (WBSF, tenderness and juiciness scores) were moderate ranging from 0.23 to 0.31. Most genetic correlations of BRD with performance, carcass and palatability traits were low or negligible. These low correlations suggest that selection to reduce BRD in feedlot cattle would have negligible effects on growth, carcass, and palatability traits. Thus, selection to reduce BRD would have minor economic consequences on production traits or product quality.

Source: Beef Cattle Research Update, November 2007

USDA SEES DOWNWARD PRESSURE ON BEEF AND CATTLE PRICES

While wholesale beef prices have dropped twice as much as fed cattle prices since April, squeezing packer margins, there are several indications that both fed cattle and feeder cattle prices will continue to decline, USDA said in a recent report.

Retail beef prices have responded to downward pressure from more abundant supplies and lower prices for competing meats. At the same time, fed cattle prices appear to be slipping from their favorable position relative to wholesale beef cutout values, USDA said in its Livestock, Dairy and Poultry Outlook Report.

Fed cattle

Although still almost \$5 per hundredweight above June 2007 lows, there are a number of indications that fed cattle prices could continue to drop, including:

- the rapid rise in the percentage of cattle grading Choice or better
- record dressed weights
- a slightly more rapid decline in the price of 50 percent lean trim versus fresh 90 percent lean trim and
- the relatively large number of cattle that have been in feedlots for more than 120 days

AVOID NITRATE TOXICITY IN THE FIRST SNOW/ICE STORM

Almost as predictable as the coming of the winter season, will be the quickly spread horror story of the death of several cows from a herd that was fed "the good hay" for the first time after snow storm. Ranchers that have harvested and stored potentially high nitrate forages such as forage sorghums, millets, sudangrass hybrids, and/or Johnsongrass, need to be aware of the increased possibility of nitrate toxicity. Nitrate toxicity is most likely if the cows are fed this hay for the first time after a severe winter storm. Cattle can adapt (to a limited amount) to nitrate intake over time. However, cattlemen often wait and feed the higher quality forage sorghum type hays during a stressful cold wet winter storm. Cows may be especially hungry, because they have not gone out in the pasture grazing during the storm. When fed the hay, the cows eat a larger than normal meal. They may be stressed and slightly weakened by the cold, wet conditions. This combination of events make them even more vulnerable to nitrate toxicity.

The rancher is correct in trying to make available a higher quality forage during severe winter weather in an effort to lessen the loss of body weight and body condition due to the effect of the wind chill. But if the forage he provides to the cows is potentially toxic, his best intentions can back-fire.

The best approach would be to know ahead of time the concentration of nitrate in the hay. Send a sample to a testing laboratory and that will quantify the amount of nitrate in the sample. If the producer is confident that the hay is very low in nitrate content then use of the hay should be safe. If the nitrate content is unknown or high in nitrate, then precautions should be taken. Feeding small amounts of the hay along with other grass hays during the fall and early winter days can help to "adapt" the cattle to the potential of nitrate. This is not a fool-proof concept. If the hay is quite high in nitrate, it can still be quite dangerous. Diluting the high nitrate feed with other feeds can reduce the likelihood of problems. Feeding a high starch grain (such as corn or milo) at a rate of about 7 pounds per 1000 pounds of body weight per head per day will reduce the risk of nitrate toxicity.

The grain should be fed about 1 to 2 hours prior to feeding the high nitrate hay. Be sure to acclimate the cows to the grain gradually as well, so as to not create digestive disorders due to grain overload.

To learn more about nitrate toxicity and management of "high nitrate feeds" read OSU Fact Sheet No. [F-2903 "Nitrate Toxicity in Livestock"](http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-1996/F-2903web.pdf). <http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-1996/F-2903web.pdf>

MARKET DYNAMICS INCREASE VALUE OF GAIN



Plenty of old rules of thumb have gone out the window in an industry adjusting to sustained high corn prices.

As an example, Derrell Peel, Oklahoma State University livestock marketing specialist, points out, "For several

months, we've seen the feeder cattle price/weight relationship continue to flatten out; that is to say, the rollback in price for additional weight is declining, resulting in improved stocker buy-sell margins."

Obviously, this heretofore atypical reality has to do with everything from feedlot demand for heavier cattle that can spend fewer days on finish rations, to the simple fundamentals of there being more demand for those cattle than there is supply.

Referring to the Nov. 1 Cattle-On-Feed (COF) Report, Peel explains, "I suspect that some of the 600- to 700-lb. feeders, and certainly most anything lighter than that, would have stayed on winter pasture if forage conditions were better in the country. In Oklahoma, wheat pasture is limited; much of the state is quite dry and although considerable hay was harvested this summer, much of it is poor quality. All in all, it isn't easy to put together a stocker or back-grounding program but the incentives to do so continue to build."

For instance, for the week of Nov. 16, based on the eight-market average for Oklahoma, Peel explains the cheapest feeder steer weighed about 700 lbs. "Steers averaging 770-850 lbs. were priced higher than a 725-lb. steer. In this example, there is a 50-lb. window where the value of gain is \$1.68/lb.," Peel says. "That alone doesn't make a viable production program but it contributes the fact that, in this same report, a 600-lb. steer gaining about 220 lbs. has an average value of gain of \$1.05/lb. Obviously, it takes time to put the weight on these animals and the market price will change but the general price relationship is likely to persist for several months at least."

More specifically, Peel says, "The market will continue to offer incentives for forage-based gains until enough producers respond. It's not easy, or cheap, at the current time to put weight on feeder cattle but the market is offering rewards for those creative producers who find the relatively cheapest way to do it."