



## Pasture to Market

Providing beef cattle industry information for producers in North Louisiana

November—December 2015

**No Title Needed....Just a Simple “Thank You”** - Since this will be the last newsletter for the year 2015, I thought it would be a great opportunity for me to exercise a little privilege. With nearly 20 years with the LSU AgCenter, I have had the opportunity to meet, help, work with and learn from a very fascinating and passionate group of agricultural producers across our region and state. As I sit here and write these words and reflect on these opportunities, it reminds me of some wise words spoken to me years ago...“When your feet hit the floor in the mornings and you do not feel like you will learn anything that day, then you may as well go back to bed.”

With that being said, it has been an honor and privilege for me to participate in your “classrooms” over the years. You have taught me ways to be more efficient, frugal and just plain down-to-earth practical. You have helped me learn life lessons of effective communication....when to speak up and when to keep my mouth shut. You have taught me to be a better person, friend and public servant.

Therefore, today I want to say “THANK YOU”!....for all of the learning opportunities you have granted me. Thank you for letting me onto your farms and into your homes. Thank you for utilizing and putting your faith in what the LSU AgCenter has to offer you as an agricultural producer.

As we move into the last part of 2015, I would like to present a challenge: Let us continue to move our agricultural industries forward by mentoring a young person with a desire to learn about our business, and by getting involved in policy and decision making by being the voice that, when combined with others, will remind our elected officials in Baton Rouge and Washington that one of the greatest assets of Americans is the ability to feed ourselves (with the safest, most affordable food supply in the world). With an estimated 458 million people in the United States and 9.6 billion world wide by 2050, we are going to have to be more efficient users of resources than ever and continue to rely on scientific research and development to help us produce more food and fiber with fewer inputs on less acreage. I hope you will join me in meeting this challenge head-on.

If you have made it to here, thank you for reading. I hope you have a good Thanksgiving with family and friends, and are looking forward to Christmas celebrations just around the corner! - *Jason Holmes, LSU AgCenter*

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**October Cattle on Feed**—The United States Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (USDA, NASS) released their monthly Cattle on Feed report Friday afternoon (October 23, 2015). The latest numbers released by the USDA revealed few surprises. Marketings of fed cattle during the month of September were down 2.44% from September 2014, while placements were down 4.12% from September 2014.

The trend of heavier placements continued this month, with a 7.8% increase in placements of cattle larger than 800 pounds, while all other weight classes saw lower placement numbers when compared to September 2014. There have been two major drivers of this trend: prices and pasture conditions. For much of the summer, feeder cattle prices had been trending at or above year-ago levels. While markets have slowed since summer and 500-550 pound Oklahoma City steers are trading for \$70/cwt less than they were just over three months ago, we are still well above even the best feeder cattle prices from 2013. The high prices earlier this year made feedlots reluctant to place lighter cattle. The recent price declines in live cattle prices have only reinforced that trend, as feeders try to avoid placing lightweight cattle, only to watch them decline in value as prices fall. Favorable pasture conditions over the summer also plays a role in the continued trend of heavier placements.

**October Cattle on Feed, continued**—The much needed rain in parts of Texas and Oklahoma should provide a boost to the winter wheat in those areas. I look for producers to take advantage of improving winter wheat conditions as well as crop residue in other parts of the Plains to graze cattle over the winter and continue the trend of placing heavier animals at least through the fall and winter.

The total number of cattle on feed on October 1 was up 2.33% from 2014 and the largest number of cattle on feed during the month of October since 2012. This month's report provided a breakdown of the number of steers and heifers on feed for the third quarter. The number of steers on feed on October 1, 2015 is up 7.44% from the same time a year ago while the number of heifers on feed is down 6.98% from the same time a year ago. The number of heifers on feed is the lowest for the month of October since the report began in 1996. This confirms what many of us already knew: we are experiencing a rapid herd expansion. The larger question remains: when will the expansion slow? - *LMIC, In the Cattle Markets, October 26, 2015*

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**Winter Forage Considerations**—It appears the hay feeding season will begin early this year throughout much of Louisiana and could over-extend hay supplies if measures are not taken to reduce hay use. We mentioned in the September newsletter some ideas for stretching hay supplies and probably one of the most feasible means for most operations is to limit time cattle have access to hay each day. Another thing to consider is reducing hay needs late in the season by planting winter annual forages. Substantial fall growth could be expected from winter annual forages planted into a prepared tilled seedbed or planted in row-crop fields following harvest. If hay supplies are severely short, you may need to consider planting winter annuals into these scenarios. It is not too late to plant winter annual forages into warm-season grass sods, and this should provide beneficial amounts of high quality forage in the late winter period of February and March. This practice should help reduce the length of time hay feeding is necessary or at least reduce the amount of hay fed during late winter.

Annual ryegrass, small grains (wheat, oats, cereal rye, triticale) and legumes can be successfully seeded into warm-season grass sods. Small grains can offer an advantage over ryegrass of increased growth during fall when seeded in a prepared seedbed, but since fall growth is minimal when seeded into a perennial warm-season grass sod this advantage is negligible in that planting system. Small grains do mature earlier than ryegrass so it may be advantageous to overseed small grains on some acreage to reduce the impact of the cool-season forage on early growth of the perennial warm-season grass. Small grains must be planted into the soil using a drill or following light disking for effective establishment. Annual ryegrass can be successfully established by surface seeding on a closely grazed or mown sod.

Another consideration is the use of clovers in the overseeded mixture to enhance forage quality and provide nitrogen fixation. Similar to ryegrass, clovers can also be established by surface seeding on a closely grazed or mown sod. Clovers are typically more susceptible to soil acidity than grasses, so you need to correct any soil pH problems before utilizing clovers. The true annual clovers, such as arrowleaf, crimson, ball and berseem, tend to be quite productive during a relatively short period (1 to 2 months) while the longer season clovers such as red and white can be productive from spring into the summer if soil moisture is adequate. Crimson tends to be the clover that provides the earliest growth, with primary production beginning in late winter. Arrowleaf is a late season annual clover, with its primary productive period beginning 4 to 6 weeks later than crimson. Clovers can be mixed with the grasses when overseeding and planted in combination with each other or planted separately in different fields to effectively utilize the growing season differences.

Even though minimal fall forage production is a limitation of overseeded cool-season annual forages, they can provide high quality forage in late winter and thus reduce late season hay needs, which should provide an incentive to consider utilization of these forages in many livestock management systems this year. These forages provide another benefit in that they do not require supplementation to meet the protein and energy requirements of livestock in almost any production period.—*Dr. M.W. "Wink" Alison, LSU AgCenter*

**Cattle and Calf Markets**—For the past two months, anticipating what cattle and calf markets will do next been an exercise in frustration and humility. The markets dropped sharply in September and rallied back the last half of October. The main question posed to me has been, "Is the bottom in?" I think so, but it doesn't have to be. And it also depends on your planning horizon.

From a long-term perspective, the bottom is not in and I think we can be in for more of the same over the next three years. It has been a long time since industry members and market watchers have had to think through how all the cattle and beef markets will react under an expansion where we actually have increased numbers. For the past several years the cattle industry - outside of cattle feeding - could count on selling animals for more than they paid for them. That is over as of this fall and I think rationality could return to valuations of heifers and bred heifers. We have not yet seen the bulk of this year's fall run of calves but the numbers do promise to be up. Further, recent beef cow slaughter continues to be below last year. The beef herd firmly turns the corner this year and we will see increased numbers into next year. And likely the next two.

The deferred feeder cattle contracts also communicate caution. March and April 2016 are at a \$10/cwt discount to the November 2015 nearby contract at the end of last week. First looks at summer 2016 contracts are likewise soft. The outlook into next year is caution. My calculation of stocker margins using basis-adjusted feeder cattle prices suggests that holding calves now into the spring is not the answer. Margins, and certainly hedgable margins, are tight. The market has recovered, the reasonably strong current basis, and weak deferred contract prices communicate that it's time for cow-calf producers to consider moving animals.

What this fall has also taught me is that the cattle feeding industry is not immune from a good-old-fashion wreck. It has been several years since we've had one but they sure can happen in October. The cattle feeding industry planned on marketing fed cattle at cash prices better than \$150/cwt and had falling costs-of-gain below \$1.00/pound. What can possibly go wrong? Let me count the ways: showlists of market ready cattle that are populated by pens that should have been shipped two weeks ago, steer carcass weights that are heavier than bull carcass weights, and even building inventories of beef and competing meats in cold storage.

What we need to see going forward is strong fed cattle marketings and fed cattle slaughter. After a hard drop in steer slaughter the first week in October, we have returned to strong numbers but more are needed. The industry will need time to seasonally reduce fed cattle weights. Showlists need to be cleaned up. And we need to remember this industry usually does not market its way out of trouble but rather places its way out. We have had two months of that occur - revealed by the September and October Cattle on Feed reports - and two more would help. All these things that are needed and are up in the air. They can happen but they do not have to happen.

Then we need to remember that competing meat supplies are abundant, imports of beef are up, exports are down and the dollar remains very strong, and the domestic consumer has been willing to spend much of the savings in energy on record high priced beef. More and more caution.

I have told a number of cow-calf producers to go back into their bank records and save a picture of that check they received in fall of 2014. The one from fall 2015 will be nowhere near as large. The one from 2014 should be framed and placed on the wall and forgot about except for celebratory purposes.

In the end, the market moves in fed cattle and feeder prices have mirrored moves in live cattle futures and feeder cattle futures. Futures have made 50% corrections upward following the dramatic downward moves between August and October. Higher prices for fed cattle and calves will need reasons - addressing one or more of the cautions above. And it would appear to be easy for this market to drift lower based on fundamentals and technicals. Again, caution is warranted.

- LMIC, *In The Cattle Markets*, November 2, 2015

**LFGC Annual Meeting**—The Louisiana Forage and Grassland Council (LFGC) plans to address the importance of soil health and the production and marketing of pasture-raised animal commodities at its 2015 annual conference. The conference will be held on Friday, December 4th, in Alexandria. The meeting site will be the LSU AgCenter’s Woodrow Dewitt Livestock Barn Facility, located on the south end of the campus at LSU at Alexandria. The campus is located south of Alexandria off Highway 71.

One of the main topics of discussion at this year’s annual meeting will be soil health. Presentations will be made on the importance of soil microbes and maintaining adequate soil moisture in pastures. There will be also be several producers on the program who, will discuss using annual ryegrass as a cover crop and a grazing resource, forage alternatives for small ruminants and producing and marketing pastured poultry, pigs and grass-finished beef. Louisiana will be hosting a national forage conference in Baton Rouge in January, and details of that conference will be discussed.

Registration and viewing of commercial exhibits will begin at 8:15 a.m. The meeting will begin at 9:00 a.m. and conclude with a lunch at 12:45 p.m. Lunch will be included in the \$10 registration fee and anyone interested in forage production and management is invited to attend. Membership in LFGC will be available at the meeting for \$35. Membership in LFGC is not required for attendance.

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**Maintain body condition between calving and the breeding season (“Don’t let ‘em slip”)**— Body condition score at calving is the single most important trait determining when a cow resumes heat cycles and therefore when she is likely to re-conceive for the next calf crop. However, it is also very important to avoid condition loss between calving and the breeding season to maintain excellent rebreeding performance. Fall calving cows normally are in good body condition when they calve in September and October. Body condition changes from the time the cow calves until she begins the breeding season can also play a significant role in the rebreeding success story. This appears to be most important to those cows that calve in the marginal condition score range of "4" or "5".

A two-year Oklahoma State University study shows the impact of losing body condition in the period from calving to the start of the breeding season. This study was conducted with spring-calving cows, but the “lesson-learned” applies to fall calving cows as well. Seventy-five cows in year 1 and seventy cows in year two were randomly allotted to LOSE body condition from calving (beginning February 11) until mid April or MAINTAIN body condition during the same time frame. Cows were exposed to fertile bulls for 90 days each year starting May 1. Pregnancy rate was determined at 70 days after the breeding season. Cows that were fed to maintain body condition from calving until the beginning of the breeding season averaged 94% pregnant, while those that calved in similar body condition but lost nearly one full condition score were 73% rebred. The body condition that was maintained throughout late pregnancy until calving time must be maintained until rebreeding to accomplish high rebreeding rates.

By studying the nutrient requirement tables for lactating beef cows, we can learn that an 1100 pound cow needs about 2.5 pounds of crude protein per day. She should receive approximately 1 pound of protein from the standing grass and/or grass hay she consumes free choice. Therefore we need to provide 1.5 pounds of protein via supplements. If we are feeding a high protein cube such as a 40% protein supplement, she will need about 3.75 pounds of supplement daily. If the supplement is a 30% supplement then 5 pounds per day will be needed. Maintaining the body condition through the breeding season should be rewarded with a high percentage calf crop the following year. -Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist; Cow/Calf Corner, October 26, 2015

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**The Acadiana Cattle Producers Fall Field Day** will be held on Saturday, November 7th, at the UL Lafayette Cade Farm in St. Martinville, La. Registration begins at 8:00 a.m. and will conclude at 1:30 p.m. Topics will include By-Product Feeds, Sources and Uses; Cattle Market Update, Detering Animal Theft; Animal ID Options; Cover Crops; Arrow Leaf Sida Control; and Plant Effects on Soil Health. For more information contact Dr. Guillermo Scaglia at 337 -276-5527 or email [gscaglia@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:gscaglia@agcenter.lsu.edu)

## **Should Beef Producers Implement Genotyping Technologies/DNA Testing Into Their Selection Strategies?**

### *What are genotyping technologies?*

The genotyping technologies that are currently being marketed to beef producers are based off of genetic markers that have been identified to be associated with economically important traits. A producer can have DNA extracted from an animal's sample of hair, tissue or blood for future genomic testing. Specifically, these genomic tests evaluate genetic markers that are inherited by animals that are either high producers for a trait or low producers for a trait. Typically, these markers are located on a single gene or in a specific place in the bovine genome. The goal in using these technologies is to increase the accuracy of selection from traits ranging from growth, efficiency, carcass quality, fertility and disease resistance. The genotyping technologies are used to try to identify the underlying genetic predisposition for important traits so that producers can select for their superior animals early in the production process. This is prior to having to maintain an animal to a specific production point to visualize if that animal is indeed superior. These technologies, if developed further, could provide a method for producers to more rapidly improve lowly heritable traits such as fertility or disease resistance.

### *How can genotyping technologies have limitations if we are looking at the genetic makeup of an animal?*

The idea that producers could make selection decisions much earlier in the production process led to the commercialization of many genotyping tests. Initially, this type of testing seemed like a good method to try to improve traits that were highly desirable or might be hard to measure in a live animal. However, producers must really understand that the concept of selecting animals based on their genetic makeup is still in the early development stages for a couple of reasons. First, there are an estimated 30,000 genes and three billion individual nucleotides in the bovine genome. Researchers are still attempting to understand where exactly these genes are and what tissues of the body those genes influence. Second, many of the traits that producers are interested in, such as disease resistance and fertility, are lowly heritable and most likely influenced by multiple genes. As such, relationships among genes and mutations on these genes need to be evaluated prior to marker assisted selection (MAS) becoming an accurate method of selection. Selecting for single markers affecting a single trait may not be the most accurate method of selection as that particular marker may not account for a large amount of variation for that trait. Thus, if producers begin selecting for single markers for single traits, it may in fact result in little if any significant improvement for that trait.

### *Should a producer use genotyping technologies?*

There are questions producers should ask themselves prior to implementing this technology into their selection. They are:

1. What traits am I trying to improve?
2. Are these traits highly or lowly heritable?
3. How much improvement in one generation or multiple generations can I expect to see by implementing this tool as part of my selection strategy?
4. Will I be able to cover the cost of testing (tissue collection, shipment, DNA extraction and cost of the DNA test) with the increased performance of my animals?

As previously stated, this technology has been around for many years but is still in the early development stages. While this technology may prove to be beneficial for some producers, it may not be cost effective for others. It is always important to know as much as you can about these technologies prior to implementation so that a decision can be made as to whether it is going to bring an added benefit to your operation. While genomic tests are still relatively new, they are getting more accurate and will continue to improve. As such, this technology, if developed correctly, will provide producers a new selection tool in the future to make them more profitable and sustainable.

—Dr. Matthew Garcia, LSU School of Animal Sciences; LSU SAS Animal Industry News Update—September 2015

## November - December Beef Cattle Management Tips:

Below are some all-purpose management tips in an abbreviated format that cattle producers should consider for the months indicated. "General" management tips are intended to fit all situations while the "spring calving - January, February, March" and "fall calving - October, November, December" tips are for those specific calving programs. Some producers are likely aware of each tip and have incorporated many into their management programs. Other producers may find these tips to be suggestions to consider in their future management. Regardless, every producer will have to consider how a specific tip might be adapted to fit their individual situation, and some modification of the times provided will be expected. Severe environmental conditions will also dictate some modification of the tips depending on the severity in each location. A more detailed description of management opportunities can be found in numerous AgCenter publications available in the local parish extension office or on the web. Additional scheduling and management details in a worksheet format are available on-line from the LSU AgCenter in the Monthly Beef Cattle Management Calendar & Workbook at:

[http://text.lsuagcenter.com/en/crops\\_livestock/livestock/beef\\_cattle/production\\_management/Workbook](http://text.lsuagcenter.com/en/crops_livestock/livestock/beef_cattle/production_management/Workbook).

Month	Management	Tip
November	general	1. Management of parasite resistance: Check parasite load of cows. Collect fecal samples on 10-20% of herd as an indication of whether deworming is needed. Follow veterinarian recommendation based on results.
		2. Remove old insecticide ear tags as you work cows. Old tags release low levels of insecticide that tend to promote development of resistant strains of flies.
		3. Keep a close eye on pasture conditions as residual summer grass is consumed. Start offering some hay before pastures are totally grazed off.
		4. As weather gets cooler, monitor cattle for lice and treat accordingly.
		5. Start feeding high magnesium mineral supplement 30 days before cattle are turned in on winter grazing.
		6. Bull sales will be beginning soon. Evaluate your herd bulls and start looking if you need new bull(s).
		7. It's not too late to get forage analyzed and order winter supplements.
		8. Deworm and implant stockers before turn out.
	spring calving	1. Inventory calving supplies and order so they will be on hand in January.
		2. Feed lower quality hay to dry cows now. Save your best hay for calving season.
		3. Check heifers frequently. They should begin calving in December.
		4. Make sure cows maintain their body condition. Supplement if necessary. Thin cows and first-calf heifers would be the most likely candidates.
	fall calving	1. Tag calves at birth. Record birth date, tag number and cow ID.
		2. If management dictates - castrate, dehorn, and implant bull calves at birth.
		3. A cow's nutrient needs increase by at least 50% after calving. If possible, separate dry cows, first calf heifers, and cow-calf pairs to feed more efficiently.
		4. Get bulls ready! Trim feet if needed, make sure bulls are in good condition and check with your veterinarian about breeding soundness exam.
		5. Check cows frequently. Be ready to provide assistance with calving if necessary.
		6. Replacement heifers should be nearing 2/3 of their mature body weight.
December	general	1. Do not graze winter annuals closer than 4". Over grazing can reduce winter forage production.
		2. Provide high magnesium mineral supplement for cows on winter grazing.
		3. Continue to monitor and treat for lice as needed.

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Month	Management	Tip
December	general - cont.	4. Evaluate your winter feed supply. Consider the amount of grazing planted, condition of grazing fields, hay quantity and quality. There is still time to buy supplemental feeds at fall prices.
	spring calving	1. Move heifers into dry, clean pastures and check frequently. They should begin calving in December.
		2. Tag calves at birth. Record birth date, tag number and cow ID.
		3. If management dictates, castrate, dehorn and implant bull calves at birth.
		4. Check breeding dates on cows. Watch closely as due dates approach.
		5. Feed requirements increase about 10-15% during the last 30-45 days prior to calving. Do not under feed in an effort to reduce birth weight.
		6. Consult with your veterinarian about suggested pre-breeding vaccinations for cows.
	fall calving	1. Check cows frequently. Be ready to assist with calving if necessary.
		2. If management dictates, castrate, dehorn and implant bull calves at birth.
		3. Tag calves at birth. Record birth date, tag number and cow ID.
		4. Start breeding heifers about one month before cow herd. Heifers should be 2/3 of expected mature weight.
		5. For a high percentage of cows to rebreed early, they must be in moderate to good condition. Probably will need to start grazing or feeding your best hay now. Supplement as needed according to forage test.

		Week of 10/30/2015	Week of 10/23/2015	Week of 10/24/2014
<i>Data Source: USDA-AMS Market News</i>				
<b>5-Area Fed Steer</b>	all grades, live weight, \$/cwt	\$ 135.38	\$ 132.95	\$ 168.79
	all grades, dressed weight, \$/cwt	\$ 208.49	\$ 204.98	\$ 264.79
<b>Boxed Beef</b>	Choice Price, 600-900 lb., \$/cwt	\$ 219.22	\$ 216.03	\$ 249.50
	Choice-Select Spread, \$/cwt	\$ 7.91	\$ 6.26	\$ 15.22
<b>500-600 lb. Feeder Steer Price</b>	Mississippi statewide market average, M&L #1-2, \$/cwt	\$ 200.00	\$ 182.50	\$ 245.00
	Missouri statewide market average, M&L #1, \$/cwt	\$ 216.94	\$ 217.37	\$ 271.55
	Oklahoma City market average, M&L #1, \$/cwt	\$ 216.26	\$ 211.79	\$ 277.47
<b>Feed Grains</b>	Corn, Kansas City, \$/bu	\$ 3.81	\$ 3.78	\$ 3.10
	Corn, Pine Bluff, AR, \$/bu	\$ 3.88	\$ 3.84	\$ 3.54
	DDGS, Eastern Corn Belt, \$/ton	\$ 123.50	\$ 122.50	\$ 95.50
	Soybean Meal, Rail, Central IL, \$/ton	\$ 318.10	\$ 326.80	\$ 401.40
	Cottonseed Meal, Memphis, \$/ton	\$ 292.50	\$ 292.50	\$ 335.00
	Whole Cottonseed, Memphis, \$/ton	\$ 270.00	\$ 275.00	\$ 225.00

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