



EXTENSION

Heifer Development

Earl H. Ward, Northeast Area Livestock Specialist

Many beef producers have just weaned their fall born calves and have selected which, if any, females they plan to retain for cows. The question now becomes “how do I develop these young females to prepare them for a productive life as a cow?”

For years research has supported the guidelines of developing heifers to 60-65% of their mature weight at the time of breeding. This means that a heifer with the potential mature weight of 1200 pounds would need to reach at least 720-780 pounds by the start of the breeding season. The main concept behind these numbers is to have a female that has reached puberty and possibly been through several estrous cycles prior to the breeding to ensure that this female is bred as a yearling and calving at 24 months old.

If asked for my personal opinion on developing breeding animals, I always say “I like to slow grow them.” Meaning that I want that animal healthy, growing, and thriving, but I want it to do it on their own time and possibly at a lower cost. I know that I could nutritionally push this animal, reach my targeted breeding size, and get that animal to cycle sooner in life. However, that additional nutrition comes at a cost as an increase in feed costs. Also, I do not want that female to get “too fleshy” because she will begin to deposit fat in her mammary glands which will result in an irreversible decrease in the female’s milk producing ability. (Continued Pg. 5)

Five Considerations for Navigating Thin Cow/Calf Margins

Scott Clawson, Northeast Area Ag Economics Specialist

1. Pay Attention to lbs. of Calves Weaned Per Exposed Cow

At the end of the day, cow/calf producers have one primary paycheck. This comes when calves are weaned and sold. Especially in times where the market is depressed, decisions need to become more focused. When we look at our cost areas for the upcoming year, we should ask how this decision will impact the pounds of calves weaned per exposed cow. Generally, improving conception rates, calving percentage, and weaning weights will have a positive impact on profit. However, there is a point where improvements can be cost prohibitive so keep a sharp pencil.

2. Extend Your Grazing Season

Winter feeding costs are no doubt a major contributor to our annual cow cost. We might generalize that as the period from first freeze to Tax Day. Every year is different and our actions regarding hay production and late summer pasture management directly (Cont. Pg. 3)

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There is a new free high-speed internet connection available in Newkirk!



Figure 1. A field view of sooty mold (black head mold) on wheat at Stillwater, OK on June 9, 2021 (Bottom Left photo). Note the darker appearance of the wheat heads in the alternating long, solid strips of wheat compared to lighter, more golden colored heads in the middle strip. The bottom two photos show wheat heads with sooty mold. [Photo credits bottom two photos – Left photo; Greg Highfill (Extn Educator, Alfalfa County); photo on right; Brad Secraw (Extn Educator, Cleveland



Wheat Disease Update – 9 June 2021 (His Last Ever!)

Dr. Bob Hunger, OSU Extension Wheat Pathologist

During the last two days there have been a couple reports of dark wheat heads being observed in fields. This is a condition call sooty mold (aka black head mold) (Figure 1). These dark heads are the result of saprophytic (living of dead tissue) or weakly pathogenic fungi growing on the dead tissue in wheat heads. Reports of this have come from Greg Highfill (Alfalfa County Extension Educator in north central OK) and from Brad Secraw (Cleveland County Extension Educator in central OK). Additionally, I have observed severe sooty mold in some of the trials around Stillwater.

Sooty mold occurs when wheat has turned but cannot be harvested in a timely

manner. Wet/humid conditions during a delayed harvest will then promote the fungal growth on wheat heads. Often wheat that has been subjected to a stress such as freeze, root rot, or drought shows a greater severity of sooty mold than if the wheat had been healthy and not stressed. This is the case in the top photo in Figure 1. The darker strips of wheat with sooty mold are the variety Pete, which was hit hard by the late freeze in April. The lighter, more golden colored heads with much less sooty mold are lines in one of Dr. Carver’s nurseries. These breeder lines were not nearly as affected by the freeze as was the Pete. Although grain yield from wheat with sooty mold often is reduced, the sooty mold itself is

not the primary cause of that reduce yield. Rather, it was the stress such as a freeze or root rot that was the primary cause of the reduced yield.

One additional point to be made is that grain harvested from wheat with severe sooty mold may show a condition known as black point (Figure 2). Black point is a discoloration of the seed (typically the germ end of the seed) resulting either from infection by various fungi that typically are saprophytic but can occasionally parasitize living tissue, or from a combination of abiotic (environmental) conditions that promote the discoloration without the presence of an organism. Like sooty mold, black point often is observed when freeze damage (Continued Pg. 5)

Navigating Thin Cow/Calf Margins (Continued)



impact the price tag of our winter feeding and grazing. There are several cost-effective ways to prolong your grazing season. Stockpiling forage and utilizing rotational or strip grazing can have a definite benefit.

3. Delay Borderline Asset Purchases

One of the hidden costs that can sneak up on the financials of a cow calf operation is depreciation. With tighter margins expected, we need to be diligent in how we make equipment purchase decisions. Can we go another year without a new tractor or baler? Can that cow make it another year? Making the separation between necessities and extras is highly important. At the end of the day, do these purchases contribute to reducing costs or increasing weaning weights?

4. Find Value in Your Market

Calf crop value can be found in many different places. Some options are based on breeding decisions and some are management options. Taking advantage of marketing premiums associated with castration, dehorning or lot size are a great place to start. In addition, looking around at backgrounding programs such as Oklahoma Quality Beef Network or marketing as natural or source verified programs are possible options. There can also be value within the calf crop. Grouping sets of heifers and marketing them private treaty as replacements or feeding out a few steers to sell halves and quarters may be beneficial.

5. Strategic Cost Management

Strategic cost management is timing annual expenditures on management practices to years where we feel profitability may be greater. Several items could fall into this list. Two that come to mind are brush management and equipment replacement. For example, brush control strategies tend to have a high cost/cow versus annual broad leaf control. Saving those expenditures for years when the market is moving upwards may be a logical option.

UPCOMING EVENTS and DATES

July 7th – Meat Evaluation Workshop

Open to Ages 8-18

Presented by Brandon Curry, Kay County OSU Extension Intern
Pioneer Technology Center Room B-120

July 22nd – Anything is a Container Garden Workshop with Blackwell Public Library.

Bring anything a that you want to put a plant in
Contact Blackwell Public Library to join 580-363-1809

July 23rd and 24th – Cover Crop Grazing and Nutrient Management Field Day

Hosted by Bryan Vincent – Private Crop Consultant
McCord, OK (SE of Ponca City in Osage County)



Gardening Tips for April and May!

David Hillock, State Master Gardener Coordinator

General Landscape

- Find someone to water plants in the house and garden while on vacation. Harvesting vegetables and mowing the lawn are a must and imply that someone is home.
- Mulch ornamentals, vegetables, and annuals to reduce soil crusting, and to regulate temperatures and moisture during hot summer months. Mulching will reduce about 70 percent of the summer yard maintenance.
- Remain alert for insect damage. Add spider mite to the list. Foliage of most plants becomes pale and speckled; juniper foliage turns a pale yellowish color. Shake a branch over white paper and watch for tiny specks that crawl. Watch for first generation fall webworm. ([EPP-7306](#))

Turfgrass

- Fertilize warm-season grasses at 1 lb. N per 1,000 square feet. Do not fertilize fescue and other cool-season grasses during the summer.
- Dollar spot disease of lawns can first become visible in mid-May. Make certain fertilizer applications have been adequate before applying a fungicide. ([EPP-7658](#))
- Seeding of warm-season grasses should be completed by the end of June (through July for improved varieties such as Riviera and Yukon to reduce winterkill losses. ([HLA-6419](#))
- Brown patch disease of cool-season grasses can be a problem. ([HLA-6420](#))
- White grubs will soon be emerging as adult June Beetles. Watch for high populations that can indicate potential damage from later life cycle stages as grubs in the summer.

Fruit and Nut

- Renovate overgrown strawberry beds after the last harvest. Start by setting your lawnmower on its highest setting and mow off the foliage. Next thin crowns 12-24 inches apart. Apply recommended fertilizer, preemergence herbicide if needed and keep watered. ([HLA-6214](#))

Trees and Shrubs

- Vigorous, unwanted limbs should be removed or shortened on new trees. Watch for forks in the main trunk and remove the least desirable trunk as soon as it is noticed. ([HLA-6415](#))
- Pine needle disease treatments are needed again in mid-June.
- Remove tree wraps during the summer to avoid potential disease and insect buildup.
- Softwood cuttings from new growth of many shrubs will root if propagated in a moist shady spot.
- Protect trees from lawnmowers and weed eaters by mulching or using protective aerated covers.

Flowers

- Pinch back leggy annuals to encourage new growth. Fertilize and water appropriately.
- Feed established mums and other perennials.
- When picking fresh roses or removing faded ones, cut back to a leaflet facing the outside of the bush to encourage open growth and air circulation.
- Stake tall perennials before toppling winds arise.

Wheat Disease Update – 9 June 2021 (Continued.)

has occurred or when harvest was delayed and dead tissue in the heads was heavily colonized by fungi that resulted in sooty mold. Black point in wheat grain can be a grading factor as the discoloration can result in black flecks in flour milled from such grain. Additionally, if used as seed wheat, kernels with black point can have reduce germination resulting in lower seedling emergence. Hence, if wheat showing black point is to be used as seed wheat, it is imperative to check the germination of that seed and to use a seed treatment that controls seed and seedling rots.



Figure 2. Wheat kernels with black point. The wheat kernels to the left and right show typical black point. The kernel in the middle is healthy. Ignore the reddish-pink color in the outer kernels as this is from an applied seed treatment.

FINALLY - This likely will be my last Wheat Disease update as my last day of work is July 9th. It has truly been a pleasure to send these updates!! I hope all of you have a great harvest this year and even better ones in the future!!! – Dr. Bob Hunger

Heifer Development (Continued)

Research from the University of Nebraska looked at heifers on low-gaining diets (1.1 pounds ADG) versus heifers on a high-gain diet (1.4 pounds ADG). At breeding time, the low-gain heifers were 53% of their mature weight and the high-gain heifers were 57% of their mature weight. They found that more of the high-gain heifers were cycling at the beginning of the breeding season than the low-gain heifers (85% vs 74%). However, there was no significant difference in 45-day pregnancy rate between the two groups (92% for the low-gain versus 88% for the high gain). The low-gaining heifers did have a \$22/head lower cost than heifers on the high-gain treatment.

The research also reported on the first year calf production and rebreeding performance. They saw no significant difference in calf birth date, calf birth weight, calving difficulty, ADG, 205 adjusted weaning weight, or percent cows pregnant with their 2nd calf. This is just one of several trials that has led University of Nebraska's Beef Cattle Reproduction Physiologist Dr. Rick Funston to suggest developing replacement heifers to as low as 55% to up to 65% of their mature weight prior to breeding depending on production costs.

A producer should be mindful of their nutrition plan for their growing females by ensuring the heifers are performing optimally while not increasing production costs. Also remember that it is recommended to have your veterinarian do a reproduction tract score on your replacement heifers and beware of the size of your bulls used on these females. For more information or help on developing replacement heifers, contact your local OSU Extension office.

Kay-Osage Prescribed Burn Association Looking for New Members

I had the pleasure of becoming a member of the K-O Burn Association, and burning ~30 acres of pasture that had a sericea lespedeza problem on August 2nd. Growing season burns are effective up until Early November, if applied correctly. By paying the \$25 annual membership fee, you have access to spray rigs, signs, rakes, shovels, and a wealth of knowledge on burn procedure. If you have a piece of ground, you need or want to burn; I highly encourage you to contact the Kay County OSU Extension Office at 580-362-3194 to learn more about prescribed burning.

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