

The Basic Resource - The National Cow Herd

Southwest Region

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I really appreciate the title of this section of the conference - The Basic Resource, because it pays proper homage to our national cow herd. I only wish I could do equal justice in describing the cow herd of the Southwest.

Only four states are included in the Southwest area: Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. These four states comprise about 15 percent of the total U.S. land area.

The diversity of environment, temperature, rainfall, and topography is tremendous. In northern New Mexico and in the Panhandles of Texas and Oklahoma, January temperatures may average 0 to 20 degrees F. Daytime July temperatures may average 90 to 115 degrees over much of the four - state area.

The average annual rainfall also has great variability. Along the Gulf Coast and in extreme eastern Texas and Oklahoma, rainfall may average up to 64 inches per year, and it may go to zero in some parts of West Texas and Arizona. The decline in rainfall is relatively predictable across Texas. As you move from the Louisiana border to El Paso, for every 15 miles west you travel, the average rainfall declines about one inch.

In the heavier rainfall areas, depending on the cost of fertilizer, cattle prices, etc., producers have profitably managed a cow per acre or a cow per two acres. During the drought years, many 100-300 section ranches in the west were completely destocked.

Although the southwest area represents about 15 percent of the land area of the U.S., it represents about 24 percent of the nation's cow herd.

Arizona	-	260,000
New Mexico	-	527,000
Oklahoma	-	1,842,000
Texas	-	5,260,000
Total	-	7,889,000

The heaviest concentration of rainfall, forage and cows in the southwest area are found east of I-35, from Oklahoma City to Dallas to Austin. A majority of the producers in this heavily populated area have small acreage and uneconomical cow herds of 5-40 cows. Low level management is the rule, since the cow herd is not a major source of income. Most of their beef cattle management information is derived

from a coffee-drinking buddy or their wife's hairdresser's husband's uncle, whose dad worked at the local auction barn two days in 1967. There is also a goodly number of ranches with 100-600 cows that do an excellent job in management.

Approximately 80-85 percent of the cattle in this area have some Brahman blood. Most have less than 1/2 Brahman, with a portion of straight Brahman. The influence of the American breeds is exceptionally strong in this section, as it is over most of the southwest area.

The most productive cow in our area is the F-1 Brahman X English cross cow mated to a growth bull of a third breed, to maximize heterosis, environmental adaptation and maternal characteristics. This "system" is supported by research from Florida, Louisiana State, Texas A&M, as well as Clay Center and Manyberries, Alberta. In many cases, the herd weaning weights will average 550-625 pounds.

In the Hill Country and Rolling Plains of Texas, Herefords reign as the predominant breed, as they do in northern Oklahoma, northern New Mexico and northern Arizona. Many of these Hereford cows have been crossed with Angus to produce black-baldies, or with Black Brangus to produce a "Super-Baldie" (with a touch of ear). Just as popular are the calves sired by Red Brangus and Beefmaster bulls, particularly where replacement heifers are saved.

The influx of the continental breeds has gradually crept into many cow herds over a majority of the southwest area. This is particularly true in northern Oklahoma and in all areas where Brahman cross cows are prevalent. Many of our cow herds now contain 1/4 - 1/2 Simmental, Limousin, Charolais, or Gelbvieh, etc.

Individuals will be individualistic and independent. This is especially true for ranchers. The cow herd in the Southwest is black, white, red, tan, tiger-striped, ring-eyed, red-necked, and spotted. There are uniform herds and herds with variability equal to the entire area's. Recently, I visited a 260-cow-herd that had seven breeds of bulls running in the pastures. Pretty well managed, and a pretty good program --- but lots of variability in the calf crop, which averaged 540 lbs. the previous year.

Needless to say, with the wide variation in environment, temperature, rainfall, and people, there is a wide and variable difference in cow size. Many of the commercial cull cows coming to slaughter will weigh in the 850-1050 pound range. Of course, there are some 1200 - 1500 pound cows. There are also some 650 pound cows. The average pasture cow in the Southwest today in the fall of the year will probably weigh from 950 - 1100 pounds.