

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Grocery disruptions continue amid beef processing chaos

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COVID-19 continues to sweep through packing plant workers leading to severe disruptions in beef processing. Estimated cattle slaughter for the week ending May 2 was 425,000 head, down 38 percent year over year. Total cattle slaughter has averaged 26.4 percent lower than last year over the past four weeks, a decrease of 689,000 head and a little more than one week of cattle slaughter at this time of year.. The backlog of slaughter cattle is growing rapidly.

Corresponding to slaughter decreases, beef production was down over 35 percent year over year last week, with average weekly beef production the past four weeks down 25 percent from the same period last year. Over the last four weeks, total beef production was down 520 million pounds year over year. For the first 14 weeks of the year, before the current reductions started, average weekly beef production was 525 million pounds. This means that one of the last four weeks of beef production has been lost due to decreased beef packing capacity.

Grocery consumers first noticed beef supply disruptions in March when the shutdown of food service shifted beef demand largely onto the retail grocery side. The resulting supply chain bottlenecks and surge in grocery demand resulted in temporary shortages in grocery supply. The supply chain bottlenecks continue, though with some time we have seen limited ability to shift some product from food service to retail. In some cases, retail label and packaging requirements have been exempted temporarily and consumers can find food service packages, often in bulk quantities, available at retail grocery.

Consumers may not notice or understand the difference, but the continuing disruptions in beef availability in May are the result of the current decreases in beef production in addition to the

continuing supply chain restrictions. The situation may become more acute as food service demand rebuilds when restaurants reopen. While the current shortages are real, it should be emphasized that they are temporary and do not imply an overall lack of beef supply in the country. The annual forecast of beef production for 2020 has not been reduced from the expectation of a record level of 27.9 billion pounds. The current situation simply means a change in the timing of that production over a few weeks.

Given when packing plant workers began to be impacted and the additional attention now focused on protecting worker health, it is likely that we are currently at or very near the worst point of packing plant disruptions. However, it is unclear how fast plants will resume production levels in the coming weeks. It is likely that the effective capacity will be reduced permanently or certainly for the foreseeable future because of the safety changes needed at packing plants. The impacts on cattle markets will linger for many weeks before backlogs are cleaned up and markets are current again.

Monitor mineral intake closely during summer

Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University Emeritus Extension Animal Scientist

Summer often becomes a busy time of year for ranchers (especially during haying season). Making certain that the cows, heifers, and bulls are receiving the minerals that they require is one of the chores that can be easily overlooked. Don't forget to check the mineral feeders or blocks to be certain that they are supplying the minerals that your cattle need. In some cases, medications may be recommended by your veterinarian to be included in the mineral mix. Cow calf operators will want to monitor mineral consumption closely to be certain that the label-recommended amounts are being consumed by the cattle. A "Veterinary Feed Directive" (VFD) will be necessary for antibiotic feeding in mineral supplements. Contact and work with your local large animal veterinarian about the appropriate VFD for your operation.

Placement of mineral feeders and blocks can aid in achieving optimum mineral intake. Place them in areas where cattle spend a lot of time. Minerals should be placed in loafing areas, near water sources, in shady areas, or any other location that tends to be a popular place for the herd to congregate. A rule of thumb is to provide one mineral feeding station for every 30 to 50 cows. Check feeders at least once a week and keep a clean, fresh supply of minerals present at all times. A good feeder should keep minerals dry, be portable and hold up to abuse and corrosion. Open tubs are not adequate in high rainfall areas. Cattle owners can receive additional help with calculating mineral intake with the "[OSU Mineral Calculator](#)" and the "[OSU Mineral Consumption Record](#)" sheets. To download these aids go to <http://beefextension.com/> and click "Other materials" and then "Calculators".

Choosing a mineral mix requires understanding of the animal's requirements and the minerals available in the forages and feedstuffs available to the animals. Mineral needs tend to be area specific and change with soil type, fertilization rates, rainfall and many other factors. Mineral requirements also will depend on animal age and stage of production. An excellent reference source for Oklahoma beef producers about mineral supplementation can be found in the

Oklahoma State University [Extension Bulletin E-861 “Vitamin and Mineral Nutrition of Grazing Cattle.”](#)

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