

Cow Country Reporter



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Just when we thought the cattle market would be better than 2019, the Coronavirus appeared in China and thanks to the "fear mongering" news media prices for slaughter and feeder cattle took a nosedive. If this situation was not bad enough, February rains during our Spring-calving season caused undue hardship on our cow/calf producers. As all of you know, I am not a fan of the "futures market" and yes I know the industry trades off it and the lending institutions embrace it, however, it is controlled by people who are not in the livestock business and don't know a cow from a pig and could care less. For the "futures market" to drop \$10.00 to \$12.00 cwt. the last week in February, for me, borders on criminal. Thanks to the news media for spreading FEAR, not INFORMATION we have got ourselves in a pretty big hole. So, my prayer for March is to be blessed with plenty of sunshine, adequate moisture, healthy calves and a mute button on my TV.

The demand for beef is good. Cattle are moving out of the feedlot to the packers and grilling season is right around the corner. Thank God that January and February and part of March are "slow times" for marketing our Louisiana calves which consist mainly of "odds and ends". There will be some replacement sales this month at our Louisiana auctions so get posted on time and dates. The January cattle inventory showed less cattle for 2020 which will help demand for our Louisiana calves.

We had two good meetings in February (Oak Grove and St. Francisville) with great information about cover crops, baling, market outlook and industry happenings. Let's continue this month with meetings addressing the cattle market. Use our weekly market update (888-528-6999 ext. 3) to get posted on current prices. May the winds of March dry out our pastures and the sun shine daily this month.

Dave Foster, CEO

REGIONAL CATTLE ON FEED BREAKDOWN

By: Derrell S. Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist

The latest USDA cattle on feed report shows that feedlot inventories totaled 11.928 million head on February 1, up 2.2 percent year over year and the highest total for the month since 2008. January marketings were 101.1 percent of last year, close to pre-report expectations. Placements in January were 99.4 percent of one year ago. The placement number was smaller than expected and will be viewed as somewhat bullish.

January placements consisted of 2.4 percent more cattle weighing less than 700 pounds compared to last year, offset by a year over year 2.8 percent decrease in placements weighing more than 700 pounds. However, over the past five months, placements of heavy cattle have been substantially larger than lightweight cattle. Since September, placements of cattle weighing more than 700 pounds are up 5.9 percent year over year compared to a 2.7 percent year over year increase in lightweight placements. In fact, placements of cattle weighing 900-999 pounds are up 7.6 percent over the five months and placements over 1000 pounds are up 8.5 percent compared to last year.

Regional differences are pronounced. Texas has the largest on-feed inventory by a substantial margin with 2.94 million head in feedlots compared to number two Nebraska at 2.48 million head. Placements increased 4.7 percent year over year in Texas in the past five months but the majority is cattle under 700 pounds, up 10.3 percent compared to over 700 pound placements, down 4.7 percent year over year since September.

Nebraska has placed 3.1 percent more cattle since September compared to the same period one year ago. However, Nebraska placements consisted of a 6.9 percent year over year increase in cattle over 700 pounds, compared

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REGIONAL CATTLE ON FEED BREAKDOWN

to last year and a 3.7 percent year over year decrease in placements under 700 pounds over the five month period. Number three Kansas, has placed 7.4 percent more cattle year over year since September with a more balanced spread across weights. Kansas placements of cattle weighing over 700 pounds has been up 8.2 percent year over year with those under 700 pounds up 6.0 percent compared to the same period last year. In number four cattle feeding state Colorado, the 9.8 percent year over year increase in placements the last five months is made up entirely of cattle over 700 pounds, up 17.5 percent with placements of lightweight cattle unchanged from last year.

Overall, cattle feeding currently is shifted to the western and southern plains with year over year increases in feedlot inventories in Texas (106.9 percent of last year), Oklahoma (103.2 percent), Kansas (106.7 percent) and Colorado (105.8 percent). Feedlot inventories are smaller year over year in Nebraska (96.1 percent of last year), Iowa (97.1 percent) and South Dakota (94.1 percent). Despite this, a bigger proportion of the heavy placements that will be marketed in the next three or four months are in Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado compared to Texas, relative to one year ago. However, this same region has recently experienced, and is most susceptible to, winter weather that may delay and spread out marketings in the coming weeks.

YOU CAN'T RAISE CATTLE WITHOUT RAISING GRASS FIRST

Rotational grazing, pasture management help Texas rancher battle drought.

Source: Bekaert Fencing

When Don Casey returned to the family ranch 25 years ago, the outfit was already in textbook condition. Under Casey's management, it's become even better.

Named 2019 Texas Conservation Rancher of the Year by the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, at 76, Casey says he comes from a long line of conservationists, recalling how his Grandpa Victor taught him to identify plants on the open range when they were riding out to check cattle or fixing fence together.

Today, he uses this skill to manage the rangeland, letting the condition, height and species of grass tell him when it's time to rotate his cattle out of one pasture or rest a pasture for an extended period of time.

Ranching runs deep in Don Casey's veins. "It is either in your blood or it's not. For me, it's just in my blood to be a rancher," explains the fifth-generation Blanco County, Texas cattleman. Fencing

It's safe to say conservation is part of his DNA as well.

Leaving enough of the plant behind is essential to not only species survival and weed control but also overall rangeland health. Over the last century, the Hill Country Casey loves lost much of its topsoil to erosion, leaving a fragile ecosystem in need of care. Through his efforts, Casey is encouraging plentiful and diverse plant species to feed and anchor the soil.

With more than 1,000 acres to manage, Casey spends much of his time meticulously monitoring grassland conditions. "We raise cattle, but you can't raise cattle without grass. So, really, I am a grass manager," explains Casey, of the belief that drives his management decisions.

Bekaert Fencing

Ranching in the drought-prone Hill Country of Texas often tests his determination to put grass management first. But he always does. Sometimes culling his herd if need be to reduce grazing pressure. Fortunately, the land responds to Casey's care. "We have been in a drought recently, and many ranchers had to sell off, but I'm not hurting at all. We are going into winter with enough grass to make it for a while."

His long-term conservation goal is to restore the land back to pre-settlement ecological conditions, providing quality wildlife habitat. "I wish I could go back and see what the land was like when my ancestors first arrived in the early 1840s."

An engineer in Austin for 25 years prior to taking over the ranch fulltime, Casey thrives on improving conditions and developing management practices that work. Practices like cross fencing to reduce pasture size so he can more intensely manage grazing. To do this, Casey's added miles of boundary and cross fencing.

Source: Bekaert Fencing

Fencing plays a key role in Casey's rotational grazing operation. "Fencing is what keeps the cattle where they need to be for the length of time I need them to be there," Casey explains.

Across the landscape of Casey's ranch, ecosystems' needs vary – and so do his rotational grazing and fencing techniques. Casey uses barbed wire to limit cattle access along two bodies of water which meander through sections of his ranch, Cypress Creek and the Pedernales River. In riparian areas he moves cattle through more quickly, leaving behind at least a foot of plants standing to increase sediment filtration and erosion protection.

Bekaert Fencing

On the open range, pasture-size increases to 150 to 400 acres, but in areas of restored pastureland, where Casey and his dad introduced Kleingrass on land that had previously been cultivated crop ground, pasture-size is reduced to 10- to 30-acre parcels. In these areas of intense grazing, Casey uses a few strands of electric, high-tensile smooth wire to keep his cattle in place.

"Kleingrass can handle pretty intensive grazing, if you manage it and let it go to seed once a season. What it does is take the pressure off the native grasses and let them go to seed," he says.

Keeping wildlife in mind, in high-traffic areas, he raises the height of the bottom wire in some sections of fence so fawns can crawl under, he spaces his wires 10-inches apart so deer won't get their hooves caught and in areas of cross fencing, he engineers small openings in the fence line – large enough for deer to pass through, but too small for cattle.

"Deer hunting is a significant part of our ranch income. We actually make more net income off deer hunting than off of cattle," explains Casey, who offers three exclusive trophy hunts each year. But he emphasizes, creating wildlife habitat is more than a business decision, it's part of his ranching philosophy.

"To me, wildlife is more than deer. It's all God's critters. I'm also a bird watcher, and I was curious to see how many different species call our ranch home. To date, I've seen 188 different species of birds."

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YOU CAN'T RAISE CATTLE WITHOUT RAISING GRASS FIRST

Casey thinks of conservation practices that benefit his family's land, making it productive for the cattle and wildlife as part of his ranching legacy. "My daughter, Cat, loves ranching, so this place is covered, and will be cared for by our family for a sixth generation."

Source: Bekaert Fencing, which is solely responsible for the information provided and is wholly owned by the source. Informa Business Media and all its subsidiaries are not responsible for any of the content contained in this information asset.

GRAZING THROUGH THE WINTER

Controlled grazing and decent planning got us through a muddy and cold winter in good shape.

By: Alan Newport

At frost last year in late October, I calculated I had enough forage under the very worst of conditions to make it through to at least April 15.

This estimate was done based on acres used per day and acres left to graze, plus some extra days for bale grazing and potentially some possible days for grazing in the hay meadow, if needed.

As it turned out, on May 7 I still had about a month of nice, mixed forage with plenty of new and some old forage (see video). For those of you who don't live in native-grass country, this leftover forage is really important to get through the spring until ample forage appears in late spring.

There are fundamentally two reasons I had so much more forage than I planned. First was the fact I moved into forage that was much better -- more copious and better quality -- than what I grazed during the growing season. Second, as the forage quality declined in late summer and early fall I had slackened up on my grazing pressure and consumption in an effort to improve quality and aid body condition on the custom cows. This resulted in significantly less animal days per acre in my calculations.

Once the frost killed the forage, I switched to much higher consumption levels, more severe grazing, and the use of supplemental protein to maintain body condition. A decision with the owner of the cattle to let the cows, which calved in late summer through the fall, slowly lose some condition and then rebreed in summer let us cut into what would otherwise have been a costly protein bill. To a lesser degree, some fescue and other cool-season grasses in the understory of the mature warm-season forage helped with protein content for the cows.

Just as important as cow condition is the way the cows and I were preparing the ground for growth this spring and summer. We consumed and tamped the vast majority of the standing forage, leaving the soil fertilized with urine and dung and ready for spring growth.

I had purchased some native-grass hay from a neighbor and used it in mid winter for bale grazing purchased, pregnant heifers. This offered me a higher stocking rate, plus the potential to add fertility and a seed source to some of the poorest land on the farm, and help in transitioning from custom-grazed cows to owned cattle.

Most of the winter we grazed at stock densities of 60,000-150,000 pounds per acre. Because much of the grazing was done in strips away from water, I could adjust stock density up or down a little bit from day to day to consume or leave more forage behind the cows and calves. If I gave too much forage one day, we could cut back a little the next and expect them to eat more of the unconsumed dry matter.

In a very wet winter we left behind a lot of hoof prints and some areas that were truly pugged. The oldest areas now are turning beautifully green with new forage.

1. All terrain

Cows really relished any area with heavy fescue coverage like this pond dam. The extra protein from green forage helped cut the purchased-protein costs.

2. Cheapest protein

All-natural 38% protein cubes served as the cheapest and primary protein source for the custom-grazed cows through the winter.

3. Under the wire

Feeding protein cubes under the electric fence offers great livestock control and plenty of "bunk space," since the animals can be spread out and kept in a line by density with which you pour out the supplement.

4. November forage

There was plenty of dry forage in November standing for the cattle to use. There was no damage from trampling, urine or dung outside the electric fence, and that kept it standing through a very rainy winter.

5. Grazing in snow

The first and only significant snow of the winter fell November 12. Cattle weren't bothered and kept right on grazing the ample standing forage.

6. Low protein

Dung was stacking up more than one would call ideal through the winter, but the owner wanted to cut protein bills and rough the cattle through because rebreeding on former summer-fall calvers wouldn't be done until well into summer.

7. Heavy rains

The author's creek crossing was often flooded, a testament to severity of the rainy winter. The native forage, however, held up well through it all.

8. Firebreak

In early January, the author moved cattle to north perimeter fence with neighbor and began grazing a firebreak along the entire fence. Peace of mind and good grazing rolled into one package.

9. Water point

All water points on the farm are temporary and are built with polywire and step-in fence posts. As a bonus, keeping electric fence over a water point is always a great idea because it constantly retrains the cattle to electricity and it keeps them polite around the water source.

10. Protein experiment

In late winter, author and cattle owner began to experiment with non-protein nitrogen as either a sole

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CRAZING THROUGH THE WINTER

nitrogen source or a supplement to the all-natural protein cubes. NPN feeds normally use feed-grade urea or a similar product called biuret.

11. New heifers

In early February author brought in purchased, pregnant heifers to transition from custom grazing to owned cattle. There was still plenty of forage, and this was an opportunity to provide from purchased hay.

12. Fence training

Newly arrived heifers were fed under electric fence in pens along existing fence until fully trained and respectful of electricity. Afterward they were moved onto pasture.

13. More training

Electric fence over the water tanks in corrals and pens is another important training aid for new cattle. It also helps protect the water valves and plumbing.

14. Mudfest

Even with heifers brought into the corral twice for only three to four days each time, the wet winter turned the corral into a mud pit. Not so with pastures, which mostly had only ATV traffic and cattle constantly moving to fresh ground.

15. Calming down

Once adapted to daily moves on pasture, the new heifers calmed down quickly and some even began to take treats from the author's wife.

16. Grazed and ungrazed

This view shows the forage grazed and trampled in the foreground, along with some puddling from fresh rainfall, with the custom cows moved into fresh standing forage farther up the hill. The date was March 18.

17. Standing tall

There was still plenty of standing forage, a beautiful mix of old and new, as author moved the heifers into it the first week of May.

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