

Intro 0:05

Hello and welcome to the extension experience podcast with your host Josh Bushong, Trent Milacek, and Dana Zook. Here you'll find insights into Oklahoma agriculture from West area specialists employed by Oklahoma State University Extension. Their perspectives come from assisting county educators and producers in the areas of agronomy, animal science and economics. Thank you for joining us.

Dana Zook 0:34

Welcome back to the extension experience podcast. I'm Dana Zook.

Josh Bushong 0:38

Josh Bushong

Trent Milacek 0:39

and I'm Trent Milacek.

Dana Zook 0:40

Today, our focus is precondition cattle in the Oklahoma quality beef network, we see the drills running across Oklahoma, and a lot of the cattle producers are probably thinking about weaning, thinking about calf prospects for the fall. And so I thought it was very appropriate to have this conversation. So today, I invited Jeff Robe to come talk to us. He is the coordinator of the Oklahoma quality beef network, which is our OQBN program. Another one of those acronyms were so fond of. And he is our coordinator and has been since about August, July of 2019. Is that right, Jeff?

So welcome, Jeff. He hails to us, in a roundabout way from Arkansas. Jeff, to start, tell us a little bit about how you came to Oklahoma.

Jeff Robe 1:32

Well, thanks for having me this week. So my pathway to Oklahoma State. I'm a bit of a late bloomer, I guess you could call me, I finished up my undergraduate work at the University of Arkansas. And it was funny how much better of a student I became approaching school at this stage of my life. And so through that, other opportunities opened up, and I'm actually working on a master's degree right now, while doing this with the OQBN program here at Oklahoma State. So that was one of the big opportunities that opened up to me and and I'm a firm believer in when opportunities present themselves, you should probably take advantage of them. So here I am now.

Very good. So you're working with Paul Beck, and doing a little research for the health side. And so maybe we'll have to have you back and talk a little bit about that after you get some data collection this fall and summer. All right. So you came to OSU, you're the acting coordinator of our program, you keep all of the people that are helping with the program - area, livestock specialists, and county educators in line, keep us all on the same page. Right?

And you guys keep me in check.

Dana Zook 2:40

Yeah, that's right. We keep each other rolling in the right direction. So the OQBN program for those of you who don't know about it, it has a lot of moving parts. And so let's dive in and talk a little bit about that. So Jeff, kind of from your perspective, and I'll add in some things, tell us a little bit of why the Oklahoma quality beef network was started and what it does for producers in Oklahoma?

So the Oklahoma quality beef network has been around for quite a while now. It started in 2001, and it's basically a program that has been developed to provide health certification management and also value added marketing opportunities for cow calf producers. And so I believe it was started as a way to provide value in calves for producers, but also to address the ongoing problem with respiratory disease in our feedlot settings. Since it began in 2001 the program is marketed over 100,000, head of stocker and feeder cattle across the state of Oklahoma and other neighboring states. So there's been a long standing history of added value to Oklahoma calves.

So this is a program that is kind of jointly operated between the Oklahoma cattlemans Association and Oklahoma Cooperative Extension. Is that right?

Jeff Robe 4:01

That's correct. It's composed of academia, industry professionals, veterinarians, cattle producers, and livestock marketers. So it's really a network of everybody that's involved with this sector of the industry to increase communication between each one of those segments - to kind of bridge the gap.

Dana Zook 4:21

Communication within the beef industry, I think it always could be improved, right? You know, cow calf all the way to the feedlot industry. And so that's what I believe. I guess, as someone who's worked with a program for a number of years. I feel like, you know, by helping producers understand the importance

of health, the importance of vaccines that they kind of have like an understanding of how well this can help us across the industry. Just benefit the beef industry as a whole.

Jeff Robe 4:49

Absolutely.

Dana Zook 4:51

So the program, let's let's talk a little bit about that. With the program basically what we're encouraging is preconditioning. What does preconditioning entail?

Jeff Robe 5:05

Well, preconditioning is composed of a lot of different parts. And the main goal of preconditioning is to set those animals up for the best possible success at that next level. And even with doing that, you know, people need to understand that these, these calves aren't bulletproof. Right? So after going through all the different requirements for preconditioning, you can't mis-manage the cattle, because they're still going to be you know, if they're put in extreme situations, and they're exposed to, you know, large amounts of stress, those animals are still gonna be susceptible, but we try and set them up for the best stage or best possible success if that next stage. And so you know, what goes into preconditioning is the health protocol portion of it, right and, and that's castrating and vaccinating, and dehorning, those animals, weaning them for a minimum of 45 days to help reduce that stress to the next level, so that they are more acclimated to that, you know, getting them trained to eat out of a bunk and know how to go to water, whether it be a trough or an automatic water, versus, you know, drinking out of a pond or something so that they don't experience those, those losses at that next level. Yeah, so those are some of the things that go into to the preconditioning.

Dana Zook 6:19

So what I'm hearing is we're priming that calf, priming their immune system and the behavior of that calf to be more prepared for stress that happens during weaning, and maybe any sort of pathogen load they may encounter after weaning, during transport. You know, a lot of those calves they could hit it a couple different places after the sale barn. And so by setting them up, we have a better chance for success. Is that kind of what you were eluding to?

Jeff Robe 6:48

Absolutely, yeah, I mean, there's, there's different benefits that that come with preconditioning. You know, there's benefits for the buyer, through increased feedlot performance, they will generally incur less expenses. So they don't have to spend those expensive antibiotics on treating sick animals. And they

also see, you know, increase product quality through carcass traits. The seller benefits from preconditioning, as well through added pounds at selling versus at weaning that seasonal price swing that we generally see, you know, if someone were to sell their calves in November versus October, on average, that seasonal price swing is about two to \$5 per hundred weight. And then also just the premium that's received for marketing your cattle that are pre conditioned. And like I said, one of the one of the big things for the buyer, is that they don't have to treat those animals, those sick animals. And what preconditioning does it addresses antibiotic stewardship addresses that mass treatment that we see a lot in, in feedlot settings, and any sort of antibiotic resistance. And so this is decreasing the use of those antibiotics to create a more immune competent set of cattle that are feedlot ready.

Dana Zook 8:01

Fantastic. Jeff talk a little bit about the premiums we've seen recently. Not guaranteed premiums, remember? We set the sellers up for as much success as they can have at those certified sales, and we'll talk about those here in a minute. But tell us a little bit about those premiums.

Jeff Robe 8:17

That's the big question that everybody wants answered, right? What am I gonna make? What is this? What kind of premiums am I gonna see from this? Last year 2019, producers on average saw \$11.93 cents per cwt. And that's pretty consistent over the last nine years. That's been pretty consistent across the board. And so we get that number by we have an economists here that work with the extension program. Dr. Kelly Raper and Dr. Derrell Peel are generally at one of the other is, is that all of our certified sales, and they sit there and they collect data for an hour or two before our cattle sell. And then they'll sit there for an hour or two after our cattle sell. And then they gather that data, you know, our preconditioned cattle versus non pre con. And that's where we come up with that premium received is based off of those sales and that data that they collect.

Dana Zook 9:16

Yeah, they collect information. I've helped them collect, you know, frame size, color, type, horns vs. none. There's a lot of information that they collect. It's really actually fascinating. I'm not real good at the frame size yet, like picking that out, but....

Jeff Robe 9:29

Yeah, they do. They collect a lot of different data on a bunch of different aspects of cattle. And so I leave all that to them. They know what they're doing there. And they they generate these premiums and they kick them out to me and then I tell the world about them.

Dana Zook 9:46

We try to encourage producers but I know that there is some concern and the producers really want to know, you know, what is that premium? Can we guarantee that premium and we can't but what we do and what I tell producers a lot of times is you can participate in our sales we have them across the state. When we have an OQBN sale, the livestock market has advertised that sale. There are buyers there that are there to buy precondition cattle. And they have a premium sale time, typically and most of our sales, and then they have a special day at our Southern Plains Sale. And so it's it's really that those cattle are advertised very well. And I think that benefits, especially smaller groups of cattle, because it does make a big difference, you know, if you have a smaller pen size that can affect the price and that sort of thing. So I always tell producers, you know, we're giving you the best chance and and in some ways, I think it's a risk management tool. And that may be out of the realm of what I should talk about, but I think it is some risk management by kind of utilizing this

Jeff Robe 10:50

That is absolutely right. I think that's, and Trent can probably speak to this more than than I can, but I mean, I think that's probably one of the main goals with raising cattle is reducing as much risk as you can. Because I mean, the cattle market in general is just a big gamble. You know, you never know what's going to happen to the markets, volatility of the markets. But I think it was Dr Raper that had put together some data here recently, she showed in a presentation to where if you go through all the requirements, you know, the vaccination and the weaning, everything that's involved with the preconditioning, the probability of positive returns is about 80%. So that's pretty encouraging. I would think for producers to know that that the probability is that is that high. When you go through all those requirements.

Trent Milacek 11:39

I mean when you are talking about selling a commodity like anything, if you're going to try to differentiate yourself, one, you got to have the trust of the producers that you're that you're selling to because you know you haul cattle to the sale, and you say they've had so many rounds of shots, I've had this and that, nothing verifies that on your own. But when you go through the program, you guys do verification.

Jeff Robe 12:00

You're absolutely right about that Trent. That's, one of the big things that separates our program from other preconditioning programs around the state and elsewhere is that OQBN program does have that third party verification process. And so buyers put a lot of peace of mind in that third party verification when they purchase those cattle. So that's absolutely huge benefit for the buyers. Another thing that I want to point out to you kind of mentioned, you know, when you're talking about the different sales is that generally we have a set sale time for the certified sales, right, and it usually takes place around noon or one o'clock. And that's a huge benefit to the seller, because one, they don't have to sit around there all day, and wait for their cattle to sell and two, from cattle perspective, those cattle aren't

standing around there all day and experiencing more shrink than maybe what they need to. And so that's a huge benefit in itself by being involved in the program is knowing when those cattle are going to sell, and they're not as exposed. So all that shrink that they might be otherwise.

Dana Zook 13:04

And the trucks of the buyers aren't full. That's a big deal. You know, we catch them before, it's 11 o'clock at night and all the big buyers have filled their trucks and they're headed home. So, I think that's a really good point, especially for smaller producers. And I would say, and just from the verification standpoint, and we'll go into that a little bit. You mentioned there third party verified. And we mentioned a few things, you know, initially. So Jeff, tell us a little bit about the verification process. This is what we hang our hat on and so let's talk a little bit about that. What are we looking for when we go verify cattle?

Jeff Robe 13:39

So when we verify cattle, we've got a checklist of things that that we're looking for. A couple things that we're going to take a look at is we're going to verify the number of head of cattle that you're planning on marketing, because when producers purchase ear tags online, and they buy 100 tags, well, they might have two or three that that gets sick or something. So we're going to make sure that we know exactly how many cattle you plan on marketing. We're also going to take a look at vaccination records, that's the most important thing, that's kind of what makes this whole thing is the health management certification portion of it. So we're gonna make sure that you've given all the proper vaccines that we require, they're all given in a timely fashion, so that you get the proper immune response. We're also going to take a look at your cattle. Now we're not quality police, we're going to leave that final decision up to the producer. But we will take a look at them. And if we see anything, any of them that, you know, we think may hurt their overall chances of receiving the best premium possible, we'll point that out to them. And then they can make the decision whether to keep it with a lot or you know, sell it separate somewhere else. And we'll also look to see that all those calves that have been castrated, they're healed from at any of them that have been dehorned that's healed as well and then we look for thriftiness of the animals, do any of them appear lethargic, sick in any way. This is kind of some of the things that we look at. We'll verify the sale date, make sure that you're still planning on selling at the time you had originally indicated, just because we put together a list and we issue that to the livestock market so that they know how many cattle are coming their way. So those are some of the things that we look at when we do verifications.

Dana Zook 15:23

I know in the past, we've done a lot of work to get producers kind of on the on the vaccination track, get them kind of changed up, you know, vaccines have changed over the years, the efficacy of them has really changed. And so years ago, killed vaccines are the way to go. But things have really changed. And so we encourage a lot of producers, for the most part to use, pretty much all modified live, we'll say that without diving deep into our three part vaccination choice of selection, but modified live five way

respiratory vaccine, we hang our hat on that. We feel that from a research standpoint, from a veterinary standpoint, we get the best immune response from that. And so we've done a lot of work over the last couple years to get producers changed over and I think for the most part, it's for the better. It's been really good to work with producers get those changes done and most producers have been really helpful and happy to do that because they're real big supporters of the program. And they believe in what we're here for. So let's talk about the sales. So we've mentioned that premium sale time, but let's just I'm going to pull this up here. So we have from the sale flyer here. We have OQBN sales at OKC West, and we have weekly sales there. So talk a little bit about that, and how that's a little bit different than the rest of our certified sales.

Jeff Robe 16:42

Yeah, so the weekly sales at OKC West was something that we we started last year, when we kind of started out as a as a trial, if you will. In past years, they've had one or two sales at El Reno. And it always seemed like one of them was bad weather. And producers were unable to get their cattle there. And that was their last shot to sell at a certified sale.

Dana Zook 17:09

Typically they had the later sale. And so that's why, you know, they ran into that sort of thing,

Jeff Robe 17:13

Right, that one in December that they would have usually was bad weather. And so we get a lot of numbers to justify weekly sales at El Reno. So it was something that we tried last year, and it came over with good success. We got a lot of positive feedback from the producers to market their cattle at a time that fits their operation. They can kind of watch the markets, they can do this all based upon their own management practices at the ranch. So we brought that back again this year because it was very successful. We did push it back a little bit. So the start date for those weekly sales starts October 13. This year, we pushed it back about a month I believe. Cattle that we saw last year and those early months, those were pretty much holdovers from the previous year and they were really big calves and they ended up selling on Wednesday with the feeders anyhow, so we ended up pushing that back about a month this year. But we also extended it about two weeks longer into 2021. So it'll run through February second I believe is the day. And then the other sales Cherokee is November 4, McAllister has two sales coming up this year, November 10 and the 17th. Payne county stockyards is November 18. Woodward is November 19. And then the last standalone sale is Southern Plains in Blackwell. And that's our largest one day sale that we have. It's an exclusive OQBN sale that's held on Saturday. And we see really, really good numbers there. And Lance and Tracy have done a good job up there. So they've been great partners.

Dana Zook 18:54

Yep, I have to kind of put a plug in for them just because I work with them. But they do a great job.

Josh Bushong 19:00

So if someone was wanting to get into this program, obviously, it's not something you want to do the day before planning out and figuring out how to get the verification. Where do you need to start steering guys towards?

Jeff Robe 19:12

Yes, so preconditioning takes a fair amount of planning, I think. You know, you have to kind of coordinate labor. If you're going to need to get labor put together, you're going to need to coordinate and plan when you're going to do your vaccination so that you can buy those in a timely manner. And one of the other big things is nutrition. Once you've got these calves weaned now, what do you do with them for the next 45 days? Are you just gonna put them out on grass? Are you gonna feed them a supplement? If you're gonna feed them a supplement? What's your goal? What's your end weight that you want to get these cattle to, you know, and what does that break down to per day? How much gain per day do you want and then you have to figure out based upon that how much feed you need. So preconditioning isn't for everyone, but it's definitely something that you want to spend some time looking into and planning. Because if you go into it one without the proper amount of planning, there's a good possibility you may not see any result. You spend too much on feed, you're gonna, they're gonna eat up all your profits. So there is a fair amount of planning that should go into it when you're doing efficient program.

Dana Zook 20:19

So Jeff, let's wrap this up and tell people how they can enroll. Tell us a little bit about tags and and mention our new requirement we have for this year.

Jeff Robe 20:28

Yes, so the new requirement we implemented this year-past years, it's always just kind of been a recommendation. - This year we are requiring that all OQBN participants get BQA certification. Now, the BQA certification is different entity altogether from OQBN. BQA is one of National Cattlemen's Beef Association's programs, and so producers can get that certification by going to their website at bqa.org to complete that certification test. Or they can look into programs around the state. I know county educators and area specialists are putting on programs around the state to get that certification as well. As far as enrollment producers can go to our website at oqbn.okstate.edu. There, they can find all the information that they need as far as which option best fits into their management practices, the approved vaccine lists, sale dates, and also the enrollment form and the vaccination record sheet. So they can go there and print off all that stuff that they need. They can also purchase tags online, on the right side of the website there says order tags online just click on that.

Dana Zook 21:40

Big Orange letters!

Jeff Robe 21:41

Right and that'll take you right to our marketplace. You place your purchase there. And then as soon as the order is processed, it kicks out an email to me. And it's pretty simple. If you're a producer that refuses to use the internet or you're not internet savvy, don't let that deter you from enrolling in the program. We'll work with you and then we'll get you enrolled, if this is what you want to do. So.

Dana Zook 22:05

Okay. Well, Jeff, thank you so much for joining us. If you have any questions, if producers out there are interested in this, go to your county office, contact your area livestock specialist or any extension office should have at least information to get in contact with the people that kind of know about the program. So we encourage you to go to that website. Check it out. It can be kind of complicated to start with, but it is a really good program. And so I appreciate you joining us today, Jeff and we hope all producers appreciate this information and hope that you can join us next time.

Jeff Robe 22:37

Thanks for having me.

Outro 22:44

We hope you've enjoyed what you've heard. If you'd like to hear more or follow up on the discussed topics, please reach out to your local county extension agent. OSU has a presence in all 77 counties with educators eager to assist you. Also, please consider checking the description for links to our social media pages and further information pertinent to the conversation. Thanks again and we'll talk to you soon

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>