



Field Notes

► by **Matt Caldwell, Richard Dyar and Ron Wesselman**, regional managers, American Angus Association

Weather major topic of discussion

On the heels of the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS), where heat and drought were major topics of discussion, regional managers Matt Caldwell, Richard Dyar and Rod Wesselman share what's happening in their areas.

At the NJAS, we heard a lot of people talking about how dry it was back home. What are conditions like in your area? Is that affecting commercial cattlemen's management plans for the 2006 calf crop?

Matt Caldwell: The moisture situation is severe in most of Kansas and Oklahoma. People are definitely looking for ways to fit management plans with drought situations. There will be a lot of early weaning this year due to lack of forage and pond water.

Rod Wesselman: The weather conditions in the Northwest have been good until the hot temperatures started in the middle of the summer. Our region had great winter and spring rains to establish excellent grass stands. There is a concern for wild fires this summer and fall because of the extra fuel (dry grass).

Along with the extra moisture comes a problem with getting hay baled without it being rained on. The alfalfa hay that was put up without rain is as high as \$135 per ton, and

good feeder hay is \$80-\$100 per ton. Hopefully, the hay season will go a little better and the price will come down.

Whatever extra both purebred and commercial producers make this year might have to be put back into higher feed costs for the winter. There are always tradeoffs and concerns with having a good moisture year.

Richard Dyar: Moisture is needed in all areas of my region. Some areas are worse than others, with cattlemen already feeding hay. Rains have been scattered, and hay supplies are short, with second cuttings either nonexistent or very short. The lower half of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana are the most critical.

Calves seem to be going to market earlier and at lighter weights. Cull cow prices are cheaper because of large numbers going to market across the country and the high cost of fuel, so buyers are buying cows closer to processing plants.

Cattlemen are exploring alternative feed sources, especially commodity feedstuffs.

With additional feed costs and less heifer retention and trimming cow herds, I

would think there would be a reduction in the need for bulls in my area unless rain comes soon for a late cutting of hay and planting of winter grazing.

Is the weather situation affecting commercial cattlemen's management plans for their cow herds?

Caldwell: The carrying capacity of ranches caught in a drought situation has been greatly reduced. With high fuel prices and an already short supply of hay in most areas, early weaning will be a good option for most people. Weaning calves early will greatly reduce the water and forage requirements of the cow herd.

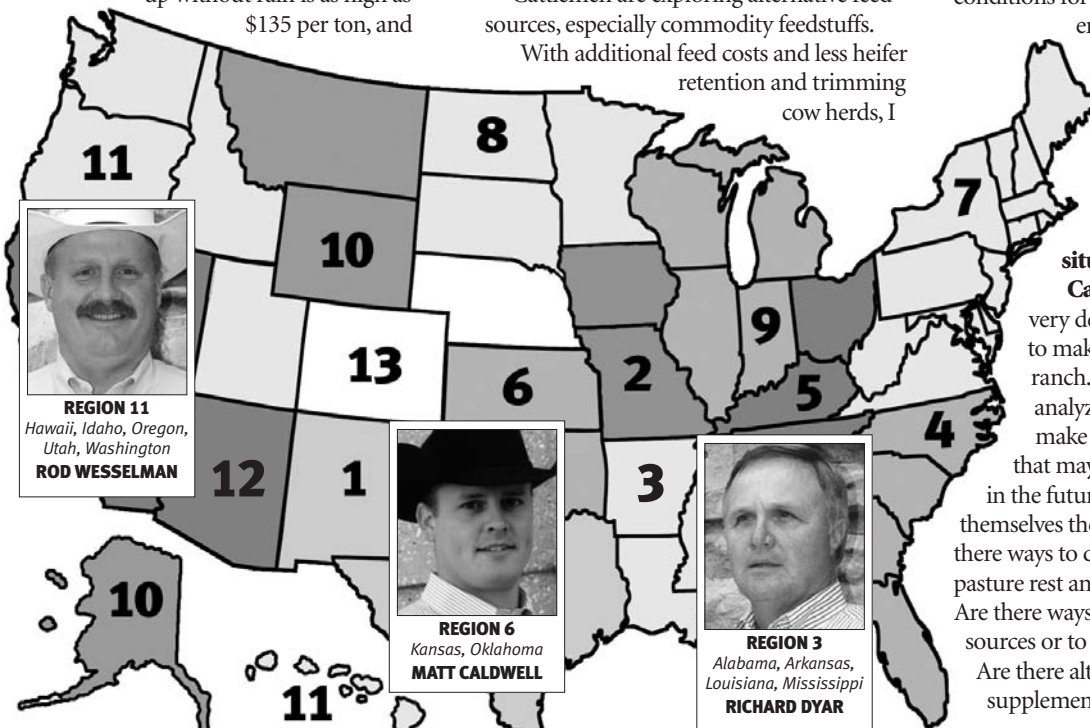
Producers are definitely beginning to look at culling the cow herd as an option also.

Wesselman: A concern in the Northwest for commercial producers is that on dry pastures and ranges this time of year there is a chance of fire that could destroy their grazing season. Then they would have to start feeding hay early and also have to let the pasture that burned rest for the next season of grazing.

I don't think that many producers in the Northwest were worried at the first of August because they have battled drought conditions for so many years that they are enjoying the great grass supplies and the water holes that were filled this spring.

Are there strategies seedstock suppliers could use this year that might be unique to the year or situation?

Caldwell: A drought situation is very depressing for producers trying to make culling decisions for their ranch. It is also an opportunity to analyze your grazing system and make changes through management that may help them survive a drought in the future. Producers should ask themselves the following questions. Are there ways to divide pasture to promote pasture rest and better forage management? Are there ways to develop alternative water sources or to better use the existing ones? Are there alternative feedstuffs or supplementation available in my area?



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Back to the junior show, what do you consider the best lesson to be learned from the NJAS?

Dyar: NAJS lessons are many but are highlighted by what can be accomplished when people and organizations come together for a common goal. My hat is off to everyone involved, especially the Indiana Angus Association for their great hospitality.

From my vantage point, the show ran as smooth as any ever held.

Besides a cattle show, this event is a tremendous educational opportunity for all youth involved. It's also a good venue to renew old friendships and develop new ones. As a veteran of almost 30 years, it's great to see junior members from the past bringing their children back to the show to participate.

Wesselman: The NJAS is one of the unique livestock events in the United States. For the juniors it is an opportunity to meet so many new friends from across the U.S. that in many cases become lifelong friends.

In addition to participating in the largest single-breed show in the nation, they also get to compete in other contests that they may not be exposed to in other venues. Examples include team sales, fitting competitions, speaking contests, the poster contest and the quiz bowl. I have told many juniors over the years that they can go to the NJAS and participate in the contests, even if they don't enter cattle. I suggest this to juniors who have not participated in an NJAS. Go without cattle the first year to see what it takes to compete and to participate in the contests.

I believe it is a great experience for the parents to go and participate as well. For many parents, it is somewhat of a vacation with their kids, but it also gives them an opportunity to meet other parents from around the nation who have the same likes and interests.

It amazes me how many juniors and parents who participate in the NJAS for the first time tell me they cannot believe how large of a show it is, and how many activities there are to do. It is fun to see juniors and parents working together in this kind of setting.

