



Climate

# Consistent Mild Climate Makes Texas, Oklahoma & New Mexico Ideal For Cattle Feeding

## **“Consistent.”**

***That’s a word a cattle feeder wants to hear.***

A consistent access to high quality feedstuffs is essential. So is the continued availability of good feedyard services, and access to every potential market for cattle. But a consistent climate, one that is perfect for year-round feeding, is the most important factor for generating top gains and excellent cattle performance.

Texas Cattle Feeders Association member feedyards in Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico have the best climate in the nation for obtaining maximum cattle performance. It’s no wonder that “Cattle Feeding Country” is the nation’s premier fed cattle region. TCFA’s 200-plus member yards finish about 7 million cattle a year ... 30% of the nation’s fed beef. Climate is a major reason for their success.

The region’s ideal weather for feeding has produced decades of consistent gains, excellent feed conversion and overall good cattle performance.

## **High Plains Heaven**

Every geographical area in the three-state region has solid attributes for cattle feeding. In the Texas and Oklahoma Panhandle areas, which includes eastern New Mexico and western Oklahoma, there is low humidity that enables cattle to enjoy more stress-free growing conditions.

“In the summer, the region’s low humidity allows cattle to withstand heat much better than in areas of high humidity,” says Dr. Bob Albin, retired professor of animal science and associate dean of research for the Texas Tech University College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources.

“In the winter, the dry climate helps cattle handle any sudden temperature change much more comfortably.”

The region’s average summer relative humidity is below 40% in late afternoon, according to the National Weather Service in Amarillo. Even in the fall and winter, afternoon relative humidity is about 46% to 47%. In the spring, it’s a low 34%. Relative humidity is often below 20% during drier periods of the year. It can even drop below 10%.

“Because of the low humidity, cattle performance remains good even in hotter-than-normal summers,” says Albin, who has co-authored a book and numerous papers on cattle feeding.

## **Low Precipitation**

Another plus for fed cattle is a low annual precipitation that averages 19.56”, according to NWS

statistics. Only two months of the year, June and August, see average rainfall over 3". There are few total overcast days during the year.

The average monthly precipitation amounts are: January, 0.50"; February, 0.61"; March, 0.96"; April, 0.99"; May, 2.48"; June, 3.70"; July, 2.62"; August, 3.11"; September, 1.99"; October, 1.37"; November, 0.69", and December, 0.43".

The region receives an average of just over 15" of snow. And as these statistics indicate, from October through April, the coldest months of the year, average precipitation is seldom over 1" per month.

## Dry Pens

With low rainfall and minimum snow, there are few if any problems with muddy pens — one of the biggest enemies of solid cattle performance. "Mud is generally not a problem for us," says Albin. "When we do receive heavy rains, they usually don't linger on. Feedyard pens can usually dry out in just a few days.

"But in wetter feeding areas (outside the TCFA region) where there is persistent rainfall or snow, it can be months before pens dry out."

Cattle in excessively muddy conditions can easily experience a 30% to 35% loss in gain. "Cost of gain is negatively affected," says Albin. "For every day an animal is exposed to heavy mud, it can easily add a day they must remain on feed."

He points out that since cattle in the TCFA area are not regularly exposed to mud, there is much less chance for problems with foot rot, which often hampers performance in other areas. Regional feedyards also benefit from a consistent breeze, which averages 13.6 mph year-round. That, plus a moderate average annual temper-

ature of 56.9° F, adds to the comfort level for cattle.

Sure, the area's winter has some cold days. But they don't linger. And since there is little winter precipitation, it's rare to see any major reductions in cattle performance.

The first half of January is the only time in which daily low temperatures average below 20°. But during the same period, the average high is about 45°. January and February see average highs in the 40's and 50's, with lows in the 20's. March and April see lows 30° to 40° and highs in the 60's and 70's. Lows don't average above 60° until about mid June. Average highs don't reach the 90's until late June. The average maximum high is 92.5° in mid-summer. Fall temperatures gradually fall, and High Plains area lows don't average below freezing until well into November.

## San Antonio Rosy for Cattle

Other TCFA member feedyards in Oklahoma and Central and South Texas also enjoy favorable feeding climates. Around the San Antonio-Austin region, average temperatures surpass 90° only during the summer. Average summer lows are 75° or below. Winter temperatures are extremely mild, with average highs in the 60's. And only January, with a mean low of 38°, sees an average low below 40°.

Rainfall is also moderate in Central and South Texas. Only four months see precipitation above 3". Winter months have average precipitation below 2". Relative humidity averages 47% in the summer, 54% in the fall, 55% in winter and 51% in spring.

All those numbers add up to a solid cattle feeding climate, especially for breeds accustomed to warmer climates year-round.

Overall, Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico performance numbers speak for themselves. Due to the outstanding climate, steers fed in TCFA member yards have an average daily gain of about 2.90 lbs. Heifers are close behind. The feed conversion rate is below 7 lbs. for steers and 7.1 lbs. for heifers.

With the good climate there's always an opportunity to improve on those performance statistics. According to studies at Auburn University, even a 5% improvement in feed efficiency can decrease diet costs and increase overall performance.

For example, if an 8 lb. conversion rate is improved by 5% to 7.56 lbs., cattle diet costs will be decreased by \$8 per ton, purchase price will be decreased by \$1.75 per cwt., and average daily gain increases by 0.6 lb.

Ultimately feeding cattle in the milder climates of Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico gives TCFA member feedyards an added advantage in serving their customer needs. "There is the basic underlying consistency in our weather," concludes Albin. "Cattle (shipped to the area from other regions) can adapt to our situations. There are no prolonged exposure to the (weather) extremes. And that shows in good performance of cattle."

He adds that experience on the part of regional feedyard operators helps them adapt cattle from other climates to the region. "Our regional feedyards have been in business long enough that they have data to share with potential clients that bear out what we are saying," he says.

"This is not a new industry here. We've been there, done it, and we're still doing it." And we're doing it in the best cattle feeding climate anywhere.