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**A LITTLE BIT COUNTRY
WARREN FROELICH
NDSU EXTENSION SERVICE
WILLIAMS COUNTY**

Cow Feed Efficiency One of Many Topics During Bovine Connection

Feed consumed by the cowherd is a major cost of beef cattle production. Most budgets I have seen show feed costs to represent somewhere between 60 and 70 percent of total cost for Upper Great Plains producers. Much of this cost is for harvested feed provided to supplement developing heifers and pregnant cows through periods when quality and quantity of rangeland forage may be limited.

An abundance of research concerning the influences of nutrition on heifer development and cow reproductive performance has resulted in guidelines on body conditions that reflect a nutrient status that will optimize reproductive performance. However, a major limitation of the research is a focus on short term effects with little consideration of long term implications.

Providing cows with sufficient feed to maximize probability of successful reproduction may not result in biological or economical efficiency. Feeding to maximize reproductive rate does not result in differential retention between females with high and low feed requirements. In contrast, managing cows under reduced feed inputs would more likely result in culling cows with high feed requirement due to reproductive failure. Furthermore, increasing the proportion of cows with reduced feed requirements may provide producers a margin of safety at times when feed resources are scarce or costly.

In addition to reducing cost of development, rearing young animals under calorie restrictions has been shown to prolong lifespan of other species. Such management in beef cattle production would certainly add to

profitability by decreasing the replacement rate and maintaining a higher proportion of cows at peak productivity.

A few years ago the USDA Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Laboratory at Miles City initiated a long term study to evaluate beef cow longevity and efficiency with limited feeding management. Andrew Roberts has been leading this research. He has consented to report details of this research during this year's Bovine Connection scheduled December 2 and 3 in Williston at the Airport International Inn. He will be one of fifteen presenters on many, many "hot button" topics.

Another featured speaker will be Jim Gerrish. He is well known nationally and internationally for efforts to help farmers and ranchers more effectively manage their grazing lands for economic and environmental sustainability. During his opening presentation Jim will share ideas as to how cattlemen can extend the grazing season and explain how stock density is the most powerful tool ranchers have available for changing the composition and condition of their pastures as well as the animals grazing habits. He will also explain how residual management affects forage growth, soil health and animal performance.

The Bovine Connection is a two-day beef symposium with the goal of bringing research results, state of the art practices and thought-provoking ideas to the cattlemen all intended to bring added profitability to the cattle producers. Since its inception in 1990, over 2300 cattle producers and associated agri-businessmen and women have attended this event. This year the Bovine Connection is targeting forage management, genetics and marketing issues.