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NDSU Extension Service

BeefTalk: Collect Data Now to Gain Knowledge for Decisions

By Kris Ringwall, Extension Beef Specialist,

"I sure wish I had that information on my herd".

How many times do beef producers say that to themselves? In today's electronic age the lack of information to base decisions on is really the result of a non-decision by producers. Computers can zip information anywhere and anytime. Yet, within the beef cattle industry the typical producer response to a question requiring a specific numerical answer is often based on a gut feeling, followed by a justifying statement.

Accurate change in response to managerial input is achieved through accurate records. If you don't believe it, ask the competition. Your competitors will gladly concur and sympathize with the non-record keeping

contingency. An uninformed competitor is easy prey. The heart of the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association's (NDBCIA) mission is to make good cattle records available to all within the industry. No cattle producer should be without knowledge. Cost should not be a factor.

Surveys indicate more than 50 percent of beef producers tag calves at birth and record the date, number and mother's ID. A smaller percentage of producers utilize this data after the calving season and an even smaller number enhance birth data with weaning information.

To help overcome the void in data collection and utilization, the NDBCIA sponsors the Cow Herd Appraisal Performance Software (CHAPS) program to help producers understand cow/calf records. CHAPS producers know what their herds produce and are not easy prey for the competition.

Data returns knowledge, which in turn gives CHAPS producers the ability to make informed management decisions. Consider this data from the year 2000:

- The average CHAPS producer exposed 170 cows to the bull with an average cow age of 5.5 years.
- Of the 170 cows exposed to the bull, 94.2 percent were pregnant in the fall, 93.6 percent calved in the spring and 92.0 percent weaned a calf in the fall.
- During the calving season, 59 percent calved during the first 21 days, 81 percent during the first 42 days, and 90 percent within the first 63 days of the calving season.
- The calves were weaned at an average age of 197 days, weighed 561 pounds and had a frame score of 5.5. These growth numbers

translated to 2.86 pounds per day of age and a 610 pound adjusted 205 day weight.

- For every cow exposed to the bull, CHAPS producers weaned 512 pounds of calf. The average CHAPS producer had 87,040 pounds of calf available in the fall of the year.
- When the year was done, only 12.5 percent of the cows were culled and 16.3 percent were added as replacement cattle. CHAPS producers are growing, not shrinking.

Ask yourself if you know the statistics listed above for your herd. Your competition knows, so should you. The bottom line, use the CHAPS averages as production targets and strive to reach them.

The North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center is a CHAPS herd, but certainly not one of the best. My hat goes off to those producers who are constantly on the cutting edge, and leading the way in cattle performance. Webster defines an opinion as a view, judgment or appraisal formed in the mind about a particular matter, a belief stronger than impression and less strong than positive knowledge. The industry is full of opinions. Webster defines data as factual information (as measurements or statistics) used as a basis for reasoning, discussion or calculations. Within an opinionated industry, knowledge derived from data will certainly increase the survival odds.

Why not be the competition.

May you find all your ear tags.

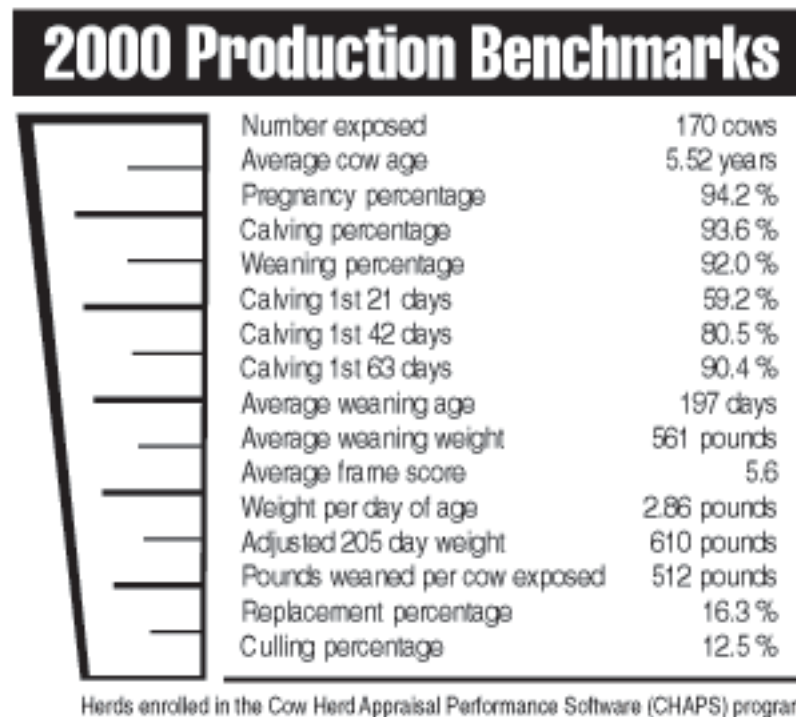
Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement

Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.COM on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0049.

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