

NEWS

North Dakota State University -- **NDSU Agriculture
Communication**

7 Morrill Hall, Fargo ND, 58105-5655, Tel: 701-231-7881, Fax: 701-231-7044

agcomm@ndsuxext.nodak.edu

December 20, 2001



BeefTalk: No Dead Slips Please

**By Kris Ringwall, Extension Beef Specialist,
NDSU Extension Service**

Every year must end, and this year is no different. The steer calves have been on feed since weaning, and should represent the best of the best for each operation. Nothing is more pleasing than to load a semi load of uniform steers that are the climax of two years of planning and management.

As with any agricultural operation, a careful watch of the weather followed by an all clear means the operation is a go. Health papers and brand inspections in hand, the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center's 157 steer calves were loaded Wednesday morning for a trip to the feedlot. These calves represent the late February to mid-April born calves weaned Nov. 6-8 and placed on a preconditioning program Nov. 13.

Previous columns discussed the weaning weight of the calves (676 pounds average) and the fact that the calves gained little from weaning to Nov. 13. Since then, however, they have gained an average of 123 pounds. The steer calves weighed about 671 pounds each on Nov. 13 and finished the preconditioning program on Dec. 17 (35 days) at about 794 pounds each. The average daily gain (ADG) was 3.51 pounds on the live calves.

Notice that I qualified the ADG on live calves.

Beef producers know the risks of preconditioning. The center lost two calves: one died of a stomach ulcer which ruptured once the calf was put on the preconditioning ration and a second calf died from a broken neck.

The center is part of an ecosystem that is made up of pheasants, grouse, coyotes, and many other four footed creatures which visitors arriving at the ranch admire. Unfortunately, a fleeting coyote or covey of grouse can startle calves and the end result is a calf with a broken neck lying next to the feed bunk.

I suspect most beef producers can relate to the unannounced fence-crunching stampede that brings everybody running in hopes to redirect. At the center, the difference between wire fence and cement bunks is simply that we spend more time rounding up cattle corralled with wire.

The beef business is a forward-looking enterprise. But regardless of how prepared a producer is, something will happen. The unknown is which morning will you discover it.

The calves off the cows (159 of them) had a value of \$560 at weaning. When loaded (157 of them), the value of the calves was \$635. Had we

loaded 159 live calves, our expenses per live calf would have been \$7.26 less.

The center maintains ownership and pays the bills all the way through harvest. Management needs to minimize, if not eliminate, costs. The envelope that accompanies the calves to the feedlot contains a complete health history on all the calves.

The calves were vaccinated with a seven-way product (Ultrabac 7) at branding and boosted with One Shot Ultra 7 in late September to early October. The calves also received Cattle Master 4, four to six weeks before weaning and again at weaning.

We like to think we do our best to plan good preventive care for our calves. Why incur those costs? The only calf a producer should ever even consider retaining ownership of is one that's going to stay alive. There's no profit in dead calves. But even with textbook preconditioning programs, the center loses an occasional calf. At least we can say, "Well, they were all vaccinated."

Unfortunately, the dead calves seem to fall in to three groups: accidental, preexisting respiratory conditions and digestive disorders. The digestive disorders tend to be bloat or overeating. Both of those can be linked to preexisting conditions. In the end, every calf needs to start life and live life with the best management possible. Yes, economics are important, but there is no economics to dead calves.

As the trucks roll down the pavement heading south, I ponder, and hope that this will be the year with no dead slips.

Happy Holidays! 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 BT0070.

###

Source: Kris Ringwall, (701) 483-2427, kringwal@ndsuent.nodak.edu

Editor: Tom Jirik, (701) 231-9629, tjirik@ndsuent.nodak.edu

Preconditioning Performance of Calves	
NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center	
Wearing Weight	671 pounds
Wearing Value	\$ 560
Shipping Weight	794 pounds
Shipping Value	\$ 635

[Click here for a printable PDF version of this graphic.](#) (5KB b&w graph)

[Click here for a printable EPS version of this graphic.](#) (76KB b&w graph)

[Click here for a EPS file of the BeefTalk logo suitable for printing.](#)

(100KB b&w logo)