

Decisions Based on Data Improve Odds, Can Help with Time Crunch

By Kris Ringwall
Extension Beef Specialist
NDSU Extension Service



The fall schedule is already filling up. Lining up weaning pen space, trucking space and ultimately a feedlot for the calves is a must this time of year. Working cows and calves, pulling off those to be culled early and getting the pre-weaning vaccinations delivered also takes time.

Time is the bottleneck that alters plans as producers make maximum use of the hours available. Expansion of the beef business is always a great topic, but for those involved in the guts of the business, time often cuts those dreams short.

At the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center, the Aug. 7 inventory lists 431 cows, 393 calves, 141 yearling heifers, 33 bulls and one steer. These numbers will change because of limited resources (feed) and the annual marketing of cull cows and bulls, steer calves and excess heifer calves.

The primary August production events have been pulling bulls the first week of August and starting the annual pregnancy check for each group of cows on Aug. 12, 15, 20, 22, 27 and 29. We'll finish pregnancy checking everything except the May and June calvers on Sept. 3. Obviously, the center staff is in the middle of checking which cows are pregnant and assigning each cow to a calving period: the first 21 days of next year's calving season, or the second or third 21-day period.

All the old cows are not checked to date, but of the 141 replacement heifers, 19 (or just over 13 percent) were open. In addition, three heifers have bad legs (two foundered and one injured), and two heifers have temperament problems (they just don't like us). That means 24 heifers make the trip to the stockyard and 117 remain as potential replacements. Seventy of these heifers are bred to Angus bulls (selected for calving ease) through artificial insemination, and 47 are naturally bred by Loala clean-up bulls.

As we ultrasound each heifer, a cranial width or body length is measured on each fetus and the concep-

tion date or age of the fetus calculated, allowing confirmation of the insemination date or the estimation of the natural service date. The sex of the calves also could be determined; however, the center currently does not sex the calves. The fetal age measurement is not a difficult measurement to obtain and certainly helps subsequent cow management.

Historically, the center has developed all of its heifer calves, not culling until this time of year. Given no previous culling, around 13 percent open is average. Predicting open heifers is a waste of time. As a heifer enters the chute, a quick glance generally prompts speculation on whether to keep or cull the heifer. However, of the 19 open, some are thin, some are fat, some are tall, some are short, some are heavy and some are light. In the end, don't second guess, just get the heifers ultrasounded and sell the opens.

There are times when those open heifers bring more dollars than the pregnant heifers do in the fall. That is the top reason: you do not see a lot of heifer development programs starting up.

The center is closing out the May-June calving herd, leaving a base herd of 350 cows. The average replacement rate for the center for the last three years has been just under 22 percent. At 22 percent, 77 yearling bred replacement heifers need to be held back and 40 heifers would move into the bred heifer market. In a strict commercial sense, replacement rate has been running around 19 percent.

Management takes time, but decisions based on data improve the odds in your favor--for today and the future. 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 BT0106.

Fall Replacement Heifer Status

NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center

Total Heifers	141
Open Heifers	19
Unsound Heifers	3
Wild Heifers	2
Total Cull Heifers	24
Total Replacement Heifers	117
Total Replacements Needed	77
Replacements for Sale	40