Use Lazy L to Make Inventory Reductions

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Reality sometimes slaps us in the face and we must step back and reassess what is happening. For livestock producers, continued drought, feed shortages and increased feed cost must be played against the perpetual card of optimism. There are real limits to the hand we're dealt and one of those limiting cards is mother nature.

Another major card is capital--just how much money a particular producer has to risk. Given those odds, there is little wonder why the wrinkles run long and deep in many a rancher's brow. Given those cards, the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center is currently reducing cattle numbers to better plan for the future.

One common thread among many financial failures is the failure to act at the proper time. (I can see this BeefTalk could spiral down to the pit of depression quickly, but that is not the point I want to make.) We are all faced with challenges throughout our lives, and generally doing nothing creates nothing.

Ranching and farming are like driving fast cars. Sometimes the road curves a little more than you want or the road conditions are not what you want. In either case, adjustments in speed and direction need to be made to survive. As the road narrows, the heart rate may go up, but careful planning and preparation will bring out the survival instinct and you can steer your way through. However, if you wait too long to make the needed adjustments, your car will surely spin out of control with possible tragic results.

Adjusting inventory is one option open to cattle producers. Keying in on bred cow sales or timing cull markets can certainly produce cash, cut costs and hopefully bank dollars for a future day or reduce debt. Inventory reductions can actually be beneficial, particularly if a focus is maintained on the core cow herd.

I have often suggested to producers that utilize the Cow Herd Appraisal and Performance Software (CHAPS) program to implement the lazy L principle. This is a lot easier for those producers who already have a calving distribution table, but if you don't, here is how to draw one up.

Take a sheet of paper and make five columns listing dates when cows calved across the top: first 21 days, second 21 days, third 21 days, fourth 21 days and late. Now make a row for each age of cow you have in the herd. When you get done, you will have made a table with all your cow ages down the left hand side and calving cycle across the top.

To complete the table, go to your calving book and mark down each cow in the appropriate box in the table. For example: cow H8220 is a four-year-old that calved 30 days into the calving season. Place a mark in the three-year-old row and second 21 days column; cow G7108 is a five-year-old that calved 15 days into the calving season and would get marked in the four-year-old row and first 21 days column.

After going through all the cows, you will have a table that shows the distribution of your calving season by cow age. Now depending on how many cows you need to cull, draw a lazy L and sell everything below and to the right of the lazy L. For example, the Dickinson Research Extension Center drew a line between the 9- and 10-year-old cows and a line between the third 21 days and the fourth 21 days to create our lazy L. We sold everything below and to the right of that lazy L.

What this does is identify the older cows as well as those cows that are not calving on time. Many of these cows will work just fine for someone else, and will clean up and fine tune your own operation. When you get done with the lazy L, don't forget to throw in a couple of wild, poor-mothering or poor-milking cows, as now is your chance to be rid of them.

Good luck, and chin up. 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 BT0119.

Dickinson Research Extension Lazy L Calving Distribution

Age	First 21 days	Second 21 days	Third 21 days	Fourth 21 days	Late
2	84	13	1	0	0
3	37	14	0	4	3
4	31	14	1	1	8
5	25	9	0	5	5
6	19	3	3	1	5
7	7	4	1	1	1
8	18	15	6	4	7
9	10	15	2	3	1
10	2	3	6	0	0
11	20	3	3	0	1
12 +	3	1	0	0	2

Lazy L inventory reduction strategy: Draw your lazy L depending on how many cows you need to cull. Sell cows below and to the right of the lazy L to reduce older cows and those that are not calving on time.