

## Use Herd Benchmarks to Evaluate Performance

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Pen preparation and weaning are front and center on most beef producers' minds as fall approaches. Data collection and analysis should also rank right up there because, once the calves are loaded and on the road, the window of opportunity to collect data is gone.

Here at the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center, a management trend becoming more commonplace is to combine data collection with pre-weaning vaccinations. Collecting data on non-shipping days is more organized and producers need to work the calves only once.

The North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA) has developed the Cow Herd Appraisal Performance Software (CHAPS) program to help producers understand cow-calf records. CHAPS helps producers overcome the void in data collection and analysis.

In the business of beef production, knowledge is power. CHAPS data provides producers with the knowledge necessary for management decisions. CHAPS producers know what their herds produce and are not easy prey for the competition.

CHAPS records provide individual herd information compared against a rolling five-year average for all CHAPS producers. This fall, herds will be compared against the average performance of herds from 1998 through 2002.

One of the values of the five-year averages is to provide benchmarks for CHAPS and non-CHAPS producers. The benchmarks provide valuable information on how your herd competes within the industry.

The current benchmark value indicates the average CHAPS producer exposed 174 cows to the bull with an average cow age of 5.4 years. Of the 174 cows exposed to the bull, 93.4 percent were pregnant in the fall, 92.8 percent calved in the spring and 90.3 percent weaned a calf in the fall. During the calving season, 59.5 percent calved during the first 21 days, 85 percent during the first 42 days, and 93.8 percent within the first 63 days of the calving season.

The calves were weaned at an average age of 196 days, weighed 558 pounds with a frame score of 5.4. These growth numbers translated to 2.87 pounds per day of age and a 613 pound adjusted 205-day weight. For every cow exposed to

the bull, CHAPS producers weaned 501 pounds of calf. The average CHAPS producer had 87,674 pounds of calf available in the fall of the year.

A goal ought to be to increase numbers and uniformity to allow for the marketing of a full semi-load of calves. Nothing is more attractive to potential buyers, than a uniform, vaccinated and preconditioned load of calves. When loads like this enter the sales ring, buyers quit talking and all attention goes to the ring.

After selling the calves, cow culling is usually not very far behind. CHAPS benchmarks showed 14.4 percent of the cows were culled and 16.9 percent were added as replacements. Those numbers indicate growth.

As a producer, ask yourself if you know the answer to the above performance questions. Your competition knows. You should too.

The herd at the Dickinson Research Extension Center is a CHAPS herd. The CHAPS production averages provide a goal for us to strive for. My hat goes off to those producers that constantly are 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. CHAPS producers are setting the standard because they know what they have.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.Beeftalk.com](http://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](http://www.CHAPS2000.com) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0159.

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# CHAPS 2003 Production Benchmarks

Number exposed	174 cows
Average cow age	5.44 years
Pregnancy percentage	93.4 %
Calving percentage	92.8 %
Weaning percentage	90.3 %
Calving 1st 21 days	59.5 %
Calving 1st 42 days	85.0 %
Calving 1st 63 days	93.8 %
Average weaning age	196 days
Average weaning weight	558 lbs.
Average frame score	5.4
Weight per day of age	2.87 lbs.
Adjusted 205 day weight	613 lbs.
Pounds weaned per cow exposed	501 lbs.
Replacement percentage	16.9 %
Culling percentage	14.4 %