Reference # - NDSU BT0261

500 Pounds Weaned Per Cow Exposed, A New CHAPS Bench-

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The North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA) has been keeping records since 1963 and annually presents five-year rolling benchmark values for average herd performance on several traits. The purpose of the NDBCIA is the improvement of beef cattle, primarily focusing on genetic improvement, but also being very cognizant of the yearly management that is involved in a beef cattle operation.

By comparing individual herd values with the overall averages, individual herd performance can be evaluated. The data from the evaluation may lead to discussion, which may be the basis for management changes.

Data trends also can be evaluated. For example, cattle have gotten larger, smaller, larger again, and perhaps have somewhat leveled off in body size. This would be a typical data trend, a trend in the overall growth rate of cattle involved with the NDBCIA program.

A notable benchmark for producers this year is weaning 500 pounds of calf per cow exposed to the bull and points to increased growth. Growth, generally thought of as average daily gain in the feedlot business, is a major component of profit. In terms of the cow-calf producer, growth has the same impact; total pounds times price contributes in a major way to gross income.

Growth for cow-calf producers is different from feedlot growth. In the feedlot, an individual calf is responsible for only bearing its share of the overhead and variable expenses, since each calf gains weight according to its genetic potential. In the cow business, that is not true.

Cows make producers money by producing calves that have more value than expense. The value of the calf principally is determined by weight, but in contrast to the feedlot calf, the cow also must carry the burden of expense for cows that do not produce a calf.

An open cow has a market value, but that value will not cover the cost of replacing the cow. Each cow in the herd has to produce a calf to cover her annual expenses and those of nonproducing cows. As the NDBCIA evaluates traits to measure cow performance, the trait "pounds weaned per cow exposed to the bull" is a trait that factors in both management and genetics.

This is just an example of the many traits NDBCIA monitors using the Cow Herd Appraisal Performance Software (CHAPS) program. Additional traits follow along with the current benchmark.

The average CHAPS producer exposed 191 cows to bulls. The cows had an average age of 5.6 years. Of the 191 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, 62.4 percent calved during the first 21 days, 86.4 percent during the first 42 days and 94.6 percent within the first 63 days of the calving season.

Here are the actual weaning numbers: age was 192 days, weight was 558 pounds and the frame score was 5.5. These growth numbers translated into a gain of 2.95 pounds per day of age and a 627-pound adjusted 205-day weight. For every cow exposed, CHAPS producers weaned 500 pounds of calf.

Knowing these numbers allows for appropriate modification through management or genetics. There are no absolute answers to what a particular ranch should produce. The academic answer is optimization. In reality, the need is to grow profitable cattle that a producer can appreciate and still meet industry needs.

Each producer must answer the question, but the answer must be based on data that ultimately tells you if you are in the game. To all those naysayers that claim you can't wean 500 pounds per cow exposed to the bull, look again. Your neighbor may be filling more trucks and trailers than you may be.

May you find all your NAIS-approved 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 BT0260.

CHAPS 2005 Production Benchmarks

Number exposed	191 cows
Average cow age	5.6 years
Pregnancy percentage	93.4 %
Calving percentage	92.8 %
Weaning percentage	90.3 %
Calving 1st 21 days	62.4 %
Calving 1st 42 days	86.4 %
Calving 1st 63 days	94.6 %
Average weaning age	192 days
Average weaning weight	558 lbs.
Average frame score	5.5
Weight per day of age	2.95 lbs.
Pounds weaned per cow exposed	500 lbs.
Replacement percentage	15.1 %
Culling percentage	13.8 %

* Five-year rolling average