

Drought and Infertility – Find the Fertile Cattle & Sell the Rest

By Kris Ringwall
Extension Beef Specialist
NDSU Extension Service



Several weeks ago, as bulls were going out to pasture, an absolute requirement was fertility. Bulls incapable of settling cows are useless and with the current feed shortage, compromise the system.

Likewise, cows that fail to settle are similar. Open cows' greatest value is salvage because they eat well, compete better and produce fat, which is not the desired product of a profitable and customer-orientated beef system.

Bulls that don't settle cows cost money. So do cows that are not bred to calve early. Feed is short; there is no use living in denial. There is no room in the pasture for infertile cattle.

Early detection of open or later-calving cows can be a potential group of cattle to cull. Cow Herd Appraisal Performance System (CHAPS) benchmarks indicate that 6.6 percent of the cow herd is typically open and 5.4 percent of the cows typically calve very late, which is defined as 63 days after the start of the calving season.

These two groups of cows account for 12 percent of the herd and would make a very logical cut today as pastures and feed start to look scarce. Another 8.2 percent of the cows calve between the 42nd and 63rd day of the calving season. This group of cows also could make a trip to town, with someone else's calving pasture the destination.

Heifers are another area to review. CHAPS data indicates that only 71 percent calve within 21 days and 85 percent calve within 42 days of the start of calving. This could be an area to review.

The bottom line is simple. Call your veterinarian and get that ultrasound date booked so you have an idea of your calving spread and can cull as feed supplies and performance dictate. Open and late-calving cows impact the bottom line the same as infertile bulls.

Recently, a producer inquired where I came up with the \$40 daily bull charge for each day a bull is infertile. The \$40 value, calculated with a little cowboy arithmetic,

is the CHAPS benchmark (Chaps2000.com, click on benchmarks) for calf average daily gain on pasture of 2.38 pounds per day times the percentage of cows cycling on any given day (assuming all the cows have an equal opportunity to cycle and breed) times 21 days (reflecting the days before another opportunity to breed if the opportunity is missed).

On any given day, 4.76 percent (1 day divided by 21 days) of the cows should be cycling. Therefore, if a bull is not fertile on that day, the opportunity to conceive the calf is lost. If a bull is in a pasture with 30 cows, 1.43 cows should be cycling each day. If the infertile bull misses the opportunity to sire 1.43 calves and loses 21 days of gain at 2.38 pounds per day, 71.47 pounds of calf is lost.

Going back to the CHAPS benchmarks, in reality, only 62.4 percent of the cows are cycling in the first 21 days. Given some rounding, roughly 70 pounds of calf is lost on 60 percent of the cows. At \$1 per pound of calf over the long haul, the end number appears to be just more than \$40 per day per infertile bull. Obviously, high market prices will inflate the number and the weight or timing of marketing also will impact the number, but that is where the cowboy math comes in.

On the other hand, \$40 may be a month's worth of hay for a pregnant cow. There seems to be some regret in repeating notes, but infertility simply needs to be steered out of beef cattle management systems. During a drought is a good time to make the point. Hope this helps and gives producers some food for thought in tough times.

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 BT0309.

Cow Herd Available to Sell If Feed Is Short

6.6 %	Open cows
5.4 %	Cows calving after 63 days
8.2 %	Cows calving between 42 and 63 days
14.0 %	Heifers calving 21 days
15.0 %	Heifers calving within 42 days

Availability based on infertility or poor fertility if feed is short.