

Now Is the Time to Plan Ahead For Thin Cows

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Now is the time to plan ahead for thin cows. When doing that, there are two very important points to consider. Cows that are thin at this time will be thin to thinner in the spring, if adequate nutrition is not increased now. Also, thin cows do not compete well with cows that are in better condition.

“Thin cows do not compete and need more feed” needs to be written on the barn wall, painted on pasture fences and noted on all your paperwork. Why now? The weather is nice and most cows are entering the second trimester of pregnancy, so their milk production is decreasing for the calf at their side.

Better yet, for thin cows pull or early wean their calves, thus shutting their milk production off. As a dry cow, weight gain will be easier to attain, especially with good fall weather. As a producer, what you do not want to do is get done celebrating Christmas and the New Year and then go out and try to develop a plan to put weight on cows in their third trimester. The cold nights and dry grass will fight you all the way. In the end, the cows at calving are thinner than they were at weaning - something you just cannot let happen.

So, let's look at additional feeding opportunities today, not tomorrow. It is well-known that thin cows (nutritionally deprived) do not breed well. Logic would say that thin cows potentially have more problems associated with pregnancy, adequate immune response, and subsequent colostrum and milk production following calving. Trying to add weight at calving also is difficult. While trying to calve the cows, the associated poor nutritional impacts of newborn calves can be manifested by increased health problems, such as scours.

What can we do? The solution is not very difficult, if one involves a good nutritionist and common sense. Yes, supplementation is an additional cost to the operation, but the right supplement can be very beneficial for production and financial reasons.

A big point - not all the cows are thin. Some are moderately conditioned and doing fine, while others are on the fat side, if not more than fat. These groups of cows need to be handled and fed differently. The most practical solution is to split the herd into at least two groups. Those cows that

are thin, showing no fleshiness or even some obvious rib and bone structure, need to be sorted out. These cows are more than likely some of the more productive cows in the cow herd, having put their heart into raising a good calf.

Their milk production warrants the extra feed and the need to recoup is real. In addition to these thin cows, younger cows also may be added to this group or grouped by themselves simply because they are not very high in the pecking order, so older, bossier cows will dominate their portion of the supplement.

The same is true for the old cows, but frankly, sell them during a dry year. The other group should be the better-conditioned, mature cows and should be fed accordingly. This group of cows should not require the greater degree of supplementation the first sort needs.

There is a third group, which are fat cows. In herds that don't have good records, there can be a significant number of poor-producing cows that do not milk well and simply keep their calf company for the summer. Do not get me wrong, these cows are good mothers, but they tend to produce light calves.

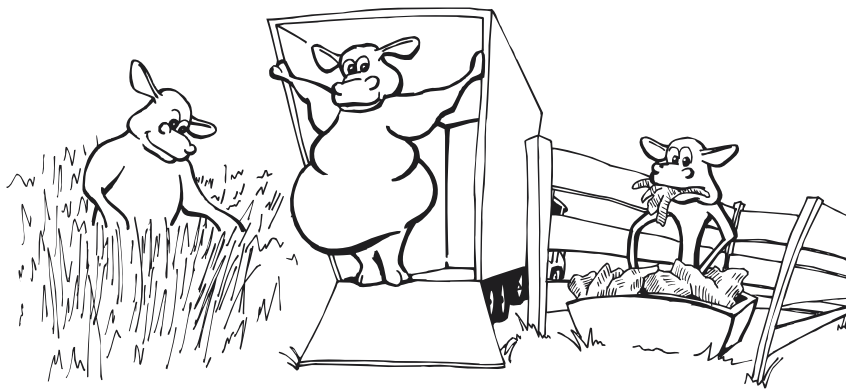
Granted, this also is a function of frame. Some smaller-frame cows simply may flesh easily, but take a good look at their calves. If they are not what you think they should be, those fat cows will sell well.

After all this thinking, do something. The bottom line is, do not wait. Fall is the time to bring cows back into condition, and if you are going to buy some supplement, put it where it needs to go. Move the calves to the lot, feed them well and split the cow herd. Those needing extra, feed them well, and for those holding their own, just feed them. Sort, sort and then sort some more. Remember, thin cows will only be thinner at calving unless you do something now.

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 BT0314.

SORT YOUR COWS



Get Them Where They Belong