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BeefTalk: Cow Size – To Win the Race, You Must Know What Race You Are In

A utopian system that goes from conception all the way to the consumer has yet to be developed.

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When selecting cows for size, the debate can rage on for a long time. In reality, personal perception defines large and small and many questions don't have answers.

However, research data shows that cattle must fit the environment in which they are asked to produce. Small cattle are not bad and large cattle are not bad. Likewise, small cattle may not be good and large cattle may not be good.

Good could best be defined as what fits the production model. Fortunately, there is a tremendous overlap in biological types and various attributes of different cattle tend to fit several environments.

Occasionally, producers can try to stuff a certain type of cattle into a production environment. In reality, that is their choice. As long as they can muster up the energy and dollars to get the cattle to fit, so be it.

The other qualifier is market acceptability. There are several markets, so the cattle that ultimately are marketed need to fit an available market.

It would be nice if the product on the rail would match the product needed in the box. However, just like production, that is not always how it is. An entire industry has evolved in getting the product to fit the box. Just like the production side, what goes in the box is a function of the markets and the economic rewards that produce an incentive for someone to get the product in the box.

The ease of any of the previously mentioned processes never can be assumed. The best that generally evolves is some localized streamlining. A utopian system that goes from conception all the way to the consumer has yet to be developed.

Although the concerns of the industry and larger facets of the world are ever present, seldom at the end of the day can a producer really measure success on a worldwide basis. Localized environments force producers to function somewhat independently to meet the demands of their local production systems.

History has shown the beef business requires many people. The competitive nature of the beef infrastructure often detracts from what is essential and what is a luxury. The beef business is home to many great people trying to enjoy life, raise a family and stash something away for those golden years.

So here we are back to the fundamental question. What type of cattle really fits the operation and when do the inputs and outputs balance in favor of the producer and the cow? Trying to gather all the knowledge regarding such a massive question soon will become burdensome, which may be why the question lingers.

There are few insights from the industry, but each individual must assess herd data to make the decision. If a group of cows averaged 1,571 pounds and stocked at 2.85 acres per month, a producer would turn out 50 cows on 640 acres for

Images

The image shows a table comparing two herd scenarios. The first scenario has 60 cows, an average weight of 1,216 lbs, and requires 2.25 acres per cow, resulting in an estimated calf production of 39,184 lbs. The second scenario has 50 cows, an average weight of 1,571 lbs, and requires 2.85 acres per cow, resulting in an estimated calf production of 31,420 lbs. A note below the table states that estimates are based on a weaning weight of 40 percent of cow weight and grazing pasture in western North Dakota producing 1,500 pounds of forage per 20.5-acre month.

Estimated Total Calf Production on 640 Acres*	
Scenario	Estimated Total Calf Production (lbs)
60 cows, 1,216 lbs avg, 2.25 acres/cow	39,184
50 cows, 1,571 lbs avg, 2.85 acres/cow	31,420

Estimated Total Calf Production on 640 Acres

4 1/2 months. Likewise, if the cows averaged 1,216 pounds, appropriately stocked at 2.35 acres per month, a producer would turn out 60 cows on the same 640 acres.

If each group weaned 40 percent of their body weight, the group of heavy cows would wean 31,420 pounds of calf and the set of lighter cows would wean 29,184 pounds of calf. However, just like in a race, when the announcer says start your engines, the skill of the driver and the performance under the hood will determine the race.

Likewise, it is apparent that when the cows are lined up at the starting gate and the announcer says start your cows, the management skills of the producer and the performance under the hide will determine who finishes the race.

The important point is to know what race you are in.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>.

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

NDSU Agriculture Communication

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Attachments



PDF - Estimated Total Calf Production on 640 Acres
(bt052908.pdf - 16.32 Kb)



EPS - Estimated Total Calf Production on
640 Acres
(bt052908.eps - 217.85 Kb)