



Beef Talk: This Is Next Year Country

Management plans and associated production must be in concert with events beyond a producer's control.

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One can see many of the living things we depend on are doing their own thing. Winter damage (kill) to trees and other perennials are abundantly evident.

There are several combinations of events that impact the living. This spring seems to be a combination of dry conditions and cold. The cold does help the recent rains in terms of soil recharge, but the prolonged cold also is discouraging much plant growth.

A look outside reminds me of mid April, an event that was two months ago. Maybe tomorrow will bring warmth and more appropriate growing conditions.

Tom Conlon, the late, former director of the Dickinson Research Extension Center, often noted that "this is next year country." This year is what makes the discussion on cow size so appropriate.

Cows need to survive for many years. The same holds true for trees, grasses, forbs and other plants. The ability to survive is embedded into their genetics.

Management plans and associated production must be in concert with events beyond a producer's control. These plans must embrace years, not just months or days.

Those who understand that "this is next year country" will survive. That process of understanding is ongoing and huge.

Much discussion centers on inputs and the need to meet those inputs in years, such as this, when feed is short. The more inputs needed, the sooner a producer runs out and the pocketbook starts to whimper.

What about the other side of the coin? The other side is production. A very good point, but trying to get a handle on cow performance is not easy. What is known is that the status of a cow, her calf and the bull can be visually assessed fairly easily.

The challenge is greater as one goes forward and tries to predict the future in order to assess managerial protocols. The cow, calf and bull weight will change depending on the age of the animal.

As animals reach mature size, they get heavier. Weight is maintained for the duration of the animal's adult life, but decreases as the cow or bull get old.

Past and current nutrition are major factors in cow or bull size. Cattle that have had access to good feed are going to be heavier than those cows that have not had good and/or sufficient feed, regardless of frame.

The concept of frame is important. Cows that are larger-framed versus smaller-framed could weigh the same amount. The difference is the amount of muscle versus fat. More to the point, we manage what we see today, but plan for what we anticipate in the future.



With that in mind, cow performance has the same problem. Cows do not produce a standard calf. The calf will vary in size at weaning depending on the age of the cow.

Although the cow can be bred to the same bull and the calf may be very similar to last year's calf genetically, the calf will be different. If the cow was 3 years old last year, she will produce more milk when she is 4 years old, so this year's calf should have the opportunity to grow more and wean off at a heavier weight.

To summarize, in order to predict or discuss the performance of cows in relationship to size, the data needs to be standardized. In other words, let's make sure we are comparing apples to apples and not apples to oranges.

Another simple question crops up. What is the percentage of a cow's weight that she should wean off in the fall?

I am out of space, so I'll give you the answer next time.

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.

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Attachments



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