BeefTalk: Calving Date Equals Latitude and Altitude

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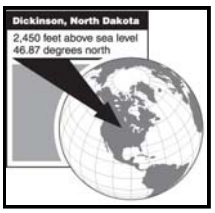
Images



Dickinson, North Dakota - latitude and altitude

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As with any major change within a beef operation, each change needs to be thought out and penciled through. Recently, the bull turnout and subsequent calving date have been the focus of considerable discussion.

For all practical purposes, the life of a ranch (or farm) literally centers on those periods that require intensive work. Calving certainly is one of those periods. The concept of calving date is critical. If a ranch does not have a live calf actively gaining weight, then the ranch only has expenses, but no income.

Perhaps the concept is not much different than a feed yard. If a feed yard is not feeding cattle, then the yard only has expenses. What is interesting, as most feeders know, feed yards must have cattle, but having cattle does not mean the cattle are making money.

Generally, if the yard is operated and managed astutely, the feed yard is operating on a positive margin. That is a fundamental every fall as feed yards compete for calves because they all know that no calves means no money.

Likewise, as cow-calf producers, ideally, each workday would generate income. However, we all know that is not the case because the calf growing season is limited to a certain time of year. That is a critical thought, as calf gain needs to be maximized during seasonal periods that offer the opportunity for calf growth. Understanding these periods is dependent on two general principals, latitude and altitude.

Latitude is a measurement that indicates how far north or south our operation is from the equator. Altitude is the distance our operation is above or below sea level. In simpler terms, each producer needs to understand where he or she is in respect to his or her environment.

Those who are closer to the equator have less snow issues than those who are farther away. However, those who are closer to the equator have more heat issues. Interestingly, heat may be more detrimental to growth than cold, particularly if the cattle are not acclimated to their environment.

On a personal note, an acquaintance once moved his cows from the merciless winters of the northern Great Plains to the perceived balmy southern Great Plains. He returned a couple of years later with cows in tow, pondering how anyone survives the south because it's too hot.

As cow-calf producers, we understand where we live, but when we seek advice, we often seek that advice from those who live elsewhere. All advice must be filtered to match one's own environment, but then a large

dose of common sense needs to be added in. In reality, there is no perfect place or climate. Perhaps, before one gets too carried away making changes, one needs to seek the wisdom of those who have been there before us.

As we grow in life, we seldom appreciate what our parents tell us. We graciously acknowledge our grandparents as they recall the old days, but they lived it. Generally, parents and grandparents will be the first to say, “Are you sure you want to do that?” Typically, we seem to think we know better and move on. Maybe we do, maybe we don’t.

Keep in mind, as major operational changes are considered, one needs to filter the many meeting comments and written editorials with a good dose of local input.

Obviously, a change in calving date has a major impact on an operation. Skirting Mother Nature is not a simple task. Again, keep in mind that an operation is a combination of inputs and outputs. In simple terms, the output is calf gain. As has been noted previously, a good benchmark for calf gain is 2.52 pounds (the summer average daily gain for more than 70,000 calves involved in the CHAPS program).

Also, keep in mind that when a cow calves does not change the cow’s nutritional requirements. In other words, the cow needs to meet her daily nutritional requirement for her individual maintenance and growth as well as fetal growth and milk production regardless of when she calves.

The environment (latitude and altitude) impacts the cow. Temperature and precipitation also need to be accounted for.

So why is the question regarding calving date being asked today? Well, cattle operations are contemplating a change. However, let’s grab a pencil before that change is made.

I’ll have more next time. Until then, look up your latitude and altitude and write it down. For starters, the latitude of Dickinson, N.D. is 46.87 degrees north. The elevation is 2,450 feet above sea level.

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

PDF - Dickinson, North Dakota - latitude and altitude (bt050709.pdf - 23.56 Kb)

EPS - Dickinson, North Dakota - latitude and altitude (bt050709.eps - 211.65 Kb)