

## **BeefTalk 524: Managers Need High Goals for Cow Reproductive Rates**

*Perhaps the biggest “yesterday” failure is maintaining cow condition.*

Producers utilizing the CHAPS (cow herd appraisal of herd performance) recordkeeping program through the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA) have a cow pregnancy rate of 93.5 percent and will follow through in the spring by calving out 92.9 percent of them.

1. How is this done? That is a good question. I would speculate that producers are learning to keep some condition on their cows.

It is nice to get ahead of the game because it takes a lot more time to get ahead than to fall behind. Too many times the saying, “I wish I had done that yesterday,” becomes very true.

Perhaps the biggest “yesterday” failure is maintaining cow condition. The impact for the cow-calf producer is reproductive failure by having open cows and delayed calving. All cost money.

There are two big points when one ponders cow condition and reproductive rates. A late pregnancy and winter weather are two demanding periods in a cow's life. Both events tend to coincide because a producer has a big, uncomfortable cow and there is a lack of fresh, bountiful grass.

Why worry now? When cows are lactating, milking and raising a calf, the cow's nutritional needs are high but generally met with good summer pasture. As the seasons change, the pasture matures. With good management, there tends to be an ample food supply remaining in many forms.

Crop aftermath, well-planned fall pastures or perhaps just general field cleanup once the fall work is done are all sources of nutrition for the cows. At the same time, the calves are weaned or at least the cows are producing less milk, so the additional nutrition can put some weight back on the cows.

Nonlactating cows in the middle of a pregnancy can gain weight and replenish bodily needs. Once its condition is regained, the cow can maintain her condition more easily through late pregnancy and the more rugged winter weather.

Now is the time to check the cows and start wondering how some extra condition can be put on the cows. One can improve a cow's condition in January, but the costs will be greater.

The bottom line is successful reproduction is often difficult to attain, but once obtained, one does not want to go backward. Producers who utilize the CHAPS program through the NDBCIA have several composite traits to evaluate the genetic and managerial processes at the ranch.

Traits, including pregnancy percentage or calving percentage, are key indicators of herd management success. The calving percentage is the pregnancy percentage minus any embryonic or fetal death loss.

The benchmark for these herds is 93.5 percent for pregnancy percentage and 92.9 percent for calving percentage. The benchmark is the average for all of the herds during the last five years.

The trend during the last decade for pregnancy percentage was 94.2 percent in 2000, 93.1 percent in 2001, 94 percent in 2002, 92.7 percent in 2003, 93.1 percent in 2004, 94.2 percent in 2005, 94.3 percent in 2006, 93 percent in 2007, 93.5 percent in 2008 and 92.7 percent in 2009. The trend has remained very stable throughout the last decade with no real gains or losses.

The same is true for calving percentage. It was 93.6 percent in 2000, 92.4 percent in 2001, 93.4 percent in 2002, 92 percent in 2003, 92.5 percent in 2004, 93.2 percent in 2005, 93.9 percent in 2006, 92.4 percent in 2007, 92.8 percent in 2008 and 92 percent in 2009.

The average pregnancy loss percentage for the last five years (CHAPS benchmark for pregnancy loss) is 0.74 percent.

Another quoted number used is the percent of open cows. This number is the reverse of the percent of cows pregnant, so the current benchmark is 6.5 percent.

The main goal is to maintain or perhaps slightly improve current cow herd reproduction rates. The best way to do that is to take advantage of nonlactating cows grazing on good fall forage. Good reproductive rates should be high on any manager's list of accomplishments.

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.

## Pregnancy and Calving Percentages

Mature Cows for CHAPS Producers

Year	Pregnancy Percentage	Calving Percentage
2000	94.2	93.6
2001	93.1	92.4
2002	94.0	93.4
2003	92.7	92.0
2004	93.1	92.5
2005	94.2	93.2
2006	94.3	93.9
2007	93.0	92.4
2008	93.5	92.8
2009	92.7	92.0