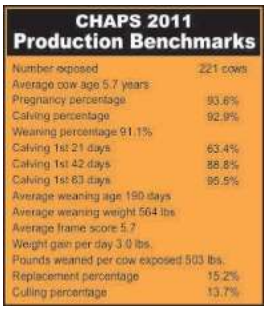
# BeefTalk 582: 2011 Production Benchmarks Are In



| CHAPS 2011 Production Benchmarks | |
|---|---|
| Number exposed | 221 cows |
| Average cow age 5.7 years | |
| Pregnancy percentage | 93.6% |
| Calving percentage | 92.9% |
| Weaning percentage 91.1% | |
| Calving 1st 21 days | 63.4% |
| Calving 1st 42 days | 88.8% |
| Calving 1st 63 days | 95.5% |
| Average weaning age 190 days | |
| Average weaning weight 564 lbs | |
| Average frame score 5.7 | |
| Weight gain per day 3.0 lbs. | |
| Pounds weaned per cow exposed 503 lbs. | |
| Replacement percentage | 15.2% |
| Culling percentage | 13.7% |

*The beef business is a long-term business, so producers need to gauge their production against solid indicators that can help them set or modify production goals.* Once again, the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA) is pleased to summarize the average performance of beef cattle herds that are utilizing the CHAPS program.

The NDBCIA has been keeping records since 1963 and presents these annual evaluations as five- year rolling benchmark values for average herd performance for several traits.

Although the individual year averages are good, the concept of a rolling five-year average provides a firmer benchmark because it buffers quick jumps or slumps in the data. The beef business is a long-term business, so producers need to gauge their production against solid indicators that can help them set or modify production goals.

The purpose of the association is the improvement of beef cattle by primarily focusing on genetic improvement and being very cognizant of the yearly management that is involved in the beef cattle operation.

Through the years, individual producers compare their individual herd values with the overall averages. This allows for individual herd performance to be evaluated, discussed and, perhaps, methods of change proposed. The group benchmarks allow producers to set goals and have a set of numbers to guide their own goals.

Although there is not an absolute right answer, an appreciation of what others are doing helps producers evaluate their own situation. If we don't know what others are doing, we can stray.

Data trends also can be evaluated. For example, reviewing the yearly values for cow age, the average cow was a little bit younger in the CHAPS data set in 2010 than in 2006, which was the first year of the rolling five-year benchmark values. The calves actually were a little bit older in 2010 at weaning than in 2006.

Interestingly, the reproductive values remained constant across the five-year period, but calf death loss was up in 2010 versus any of the previous four years.

The pounds weaned per cow exposed still are holding and are consistent at above 500 pounds. Growth and reproduction tend to be the mainstay of the beef business, so those involved in the NDBCIA CHAPS program excel.

Generally, growth is thought of as the average daily gain in the feedlot business and is a major component of profit for the cow-calf producer. The typical average daily gain for CHAPS calves is 2.52 pounds. In terms of the cow-calf producer, growth has the same impact because total pounds times price contributes in a major way to gross income.

The value of the calf is determined principally by weight. In contrast to the feedlot calf, the cow also must carry the burden of expense for cows that do not produce a calf.

Granted, the open cow (typical CHAPS open cow value of 6.4 percent) has a market value, but that value will not cover the cost of replacing the cow. Therefore, each cow in the herd has to produce to cover her annual expenses and for nonproducing cows. The better the herd reproduction, the more likely the herd can cover expenses.

As the NDBCIA evaluates traits to measure cow performance, the trait "pounds weaned per cow exposed to the bull" is a trait that factors in both management and genetics. This is just an example of the many traits NDBCIA monitors using the CHAPS program.

Additional traits follow along with the current benchmarks. The average CHAPS producer exposed 221 cows to bulls. The cows had an average age of 5.7 years. Of the 221 cows exposed to the bull, 93.6 percent were pregnant in the fall, 92.9 percent calved in the spring and 91.1 percent weaned a calf in the fall.

During the calving season, 63.4 percent calved during the first 21 days, 88.8 percent during the first 42 days and 95.5 percent within the first 63 days of the calving season.

The weaning age was 190 days, the weight was 564 pounds and the frame score was 5.7. These growth numbers translated into 3 pounds weight per day of age and a 636-pound adjusted 205-day weight. For every cow exposed, CHAPS producers weaned 503 pounds of calf.

Knowing these numbers allows for appropriate modification through management or genetics. There are no absolute answers to what a particular ranch should produce. The academic answer is optimization.

In reality, the need is to grow profitable cattle that a producer can appreciate and still meet industry needs. Each producer must answer the question, but the answer must be based on data that ultimately tells you if you are in the game.

May you find all your ear tags.