



BeefTalk 612: Those Cows Can't Catch Me Now

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Calving Starts May 1st
NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center

First WeekFour Calves
Second WeekFourteen Calves
Third Week Fifty Calves

Just keep the calves coming!

It has been just more than a year since the Dickinson Research Extension Center initially decided to furlough the bulls for a month by changing bull turnout from early and mid-June to the second week of July.

The calving season was delayed, but all is good. A passing comment was heard: "Those cows can't catch me now that I don't have all those heavy coveralls on!" Again, all is good.

It has been just more than a year since the Dickinson Research Extension Center initially decided to furlough the bulls for a month by changing bull turnout from early and mid-June to the second week of July. However, as the breeding plans were being finalized and additional discussions were held,

the bull turnout dates were changed to mid-August. The change pulled the center's calving date further from the grips of winter and closer to the warmth of summer.

Having just lived through a very nice winter and living with the ribbing of recent discussions about spring calving, the center's cows are finally calving. This is the year the center switched calving dates and furloughed the bulls for two months last summer, so it is nice to see calves finally.

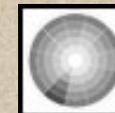
Interestingly, the calves are harder to find when only an occasional ear can be seen above the warm spring grass versus a dark spot on a snowbank. Watching events unfold and waiting and waiting for calving information would not seem to be a talking point, but it is. Changing the calving season that is so historically entrenched in management and ranch operations is equivalent to changing a job or many other life-changing events.

Life changed and so did the work. These past winter months, there was time for the daily chores and even time to fix or repair stuff that has needed fixing for some time. The good winter brought the occasional comment: "Why are we not calving?"

All and all, this was a big change, so the hesitation has not gone away. The lingering gut cramp still is there as we realize that, once the calving date is changed, the ability to go back is very difficult. The center cannot go back, and the "what ifs" still linger in the background.



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As the calving season started, the tractor and loader and various heavy pieces of equipment for snow removal and hauling hay are not obvious. A used all-terrain vehicle was purchased for checking the calves. Other changes will come and the need to tweak is obvious.

The stocking rates for pregnant cows were debated. How a large, fully expanded cow equates to a milking cow with a 150-pound calf at its side was not in any table. The debate was settled as cows with no calves at their side were placed on cool-season grass around May 1.

Yes, this discussion certainly had its origin in the past and no one is hiding from the fact that calving times are subject to the weather, as are all events in life. Yes, calving can have its bad days and the weather can be difficult. However, the partial consensus was that it was time to move to a grass-based operation. That consensus was arrived at with a little advice and lots of thought. A little bit of data also was sprinkled in. The data part is difficult because the ability to find good late-calving research is skimpy.

There is a lot of good, solid research on many beef cattle topics. However, other management practices and a lot of personal opinion often confound the comparison of calving dates. This makes the data difficult to interpret. However, the center is busy collecting data in a new world.

The all-terrain vehicle is getting used and the calving book is filling up. To date, 41 calves have been born to the beef group, which are cows that have heavier growth genetics. Twenty-five calves have been born to the range group, which is a slightly lighter group of cows.

Calf birth weights have averaged 80 pounds for the beef group and 66 pounds for the range group. Each group has experienced some unfortunate calving experiences, with three of the beef cows sloughing calves. All the cows did well, but we at the center were reminded that changing the calving date does not eliminate all of the problems.

In addition, once the calving season got going, one range cow required a caesarian delivery because of a breech birth. Again, a reminder that just because one decides to calve cows on pasture, the cattle still need to be checked. The center has not had a caesarian delivery in years. In fact, I cannot remember when there was such a delivery.

The calf weighed in at 70 pounds. On some days, that is just the way it is. However, the cows are pushing out calves, so life is good. The change was good.

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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