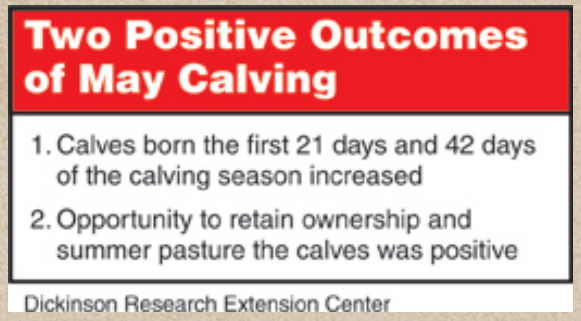
BeefTalk 672: Positive Outcomes of May Calving in N.D.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



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Is $300 worth discussing during coffee? Some time ago, the Dickinson Research Extension Center decided change was needed. Perhaps it was the weather, perhaps it was the industry or perhaps it simply was a need to search new paths because of the constant evolution of people and their desires. Whatever the reason, the center changed.

The cattle industry could be considered a mature industry because the models for production are fairly well-known. However, the implementation of those production models is dependent on the producer. Each producer sorts through the various management and genetic options to select the best production model for the demands of his or her operation.

Was it the right decision for the center? Cattle systems take years to implement and evaluate, but some early thoughts are starting to percolate. What system is good? Was the change the right one?

In the production world, the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association has utilized CHAPS through the North Dakota State University Extension Service to evaluate cow-calf production values. The assumption is that the industry hovers around management practices that are doable and can make some money.

No management scheme is perfect. However, by pooling the data from several herds, the average of the group should be reflective of acceptable and doable values for the traits that are reviewed. The benchmarks are presented yearly as composite five-year rolling values. The benchmarks provide the industry with some typical values to evaluate against an individual's operation.

If we were to gauge some of our current production against the standard benchmark data, reproduction is the trait that stands out. The CHAPS benchmark for the number of calves born within the first 21 days is 63.4 percent, while the number of calves born within 42 days from the start of the calving season is 88.8 percent.

This was the second year that the center has calved in May. For the center, 89.2 percent of the cows calved within the first 21 days of the calving season and 99.6 percent calved within 42 days from the start of the calving season.

Full Color Graphic
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The bulls were turned out on Aug. 1, 2012, and the start of the calving season was set at May 10, which was 283 days following the bull turnout. May 31 was considered the end of the first 21 days of the calving season and June 21 was considered the end of the first 42 days of the calving season.

The cows were expected to rebreed in a timely fashion. The conversion of the cows to the May calving program was accomplished by maintaining the current cows, while culling open or late cows. However, the data only suggests that historical culling patterns were maintained, so the timely calving dates were not a function of culling late-bred cows.

The point is that the cows bred quickly. That is a plus and certainly worth discussing. Again, 90 percent of the cows that calved conceived within 21 days of bull turnout. If that trend continues, that would be a very positive effect of later calving.

That trait alone should keep beef producers pondering later calving. The concern always will be about summer heat during breeding. Bull fertility is known to be impacted by high temperatures but, at least for this past year, the bulls got the cows bred.

The other significant piece of information that seems to reflect positively on calving later is the $300 spread in return to the producer. In preparation for the switch in calving time, the center, for the past two years, treated the March through April borne calves as grass cattle. The spread was in favor of those calves that were summered as yearlings and then moved to the feedlot in early fall.

Two good points as the center reflects on the change in calving date: There was an apparent positive impact on cow reproduction and bull breeding performance. Also, those calves held over for grass and annual crop grazing the following spring and summer before going to the feedlot in the fall brought home more dollars than if backgrounding them in the winter and going to the feedlot in the spring.

Keep in mind that there are lots of ways to play a piano. Most common pianos have 88 keys, so the assortment of music that can be heard is unlimited. Cattle production is no different. One can make good music and raise good beef by combining the various inputs that are available. What works for one producer may not always work for the next producer. However, both systems can work.

When the center switched to May calving, the resources were not available to evaluate and formulate a large study to measure the effects of different calving seasons. However, through good, sound benchmarks and thought, one does know what is working.

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.