



BeefTalk: Give Special Care to Cows that will be three years old. They Need it

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Probably the most difficult position in a cow herd is the first calf heifer. As she weans her first calf, she is two-and-one-half years old. She will be three years old at her next calving and the youngest producing cow in the herd. She is youthful, but she is also low on the pecking order.

After a summer of having room to run, she finds herself with all the old boss cows and wondering where to turn. Her life gives new meaning to stress: facing down mature fully grown cows when they are hungry, fighting for room to lay down on bedding, etc. Old cows out-weigh the first calf heifer by 220 pounds (about 17 percent) and have more energy reserve in terms of body condition.

Typical first calf heifers have a condition score of 4.9 while your mature cows

will average 5 or more. Factor experience into the equation for the old cows and it is easy to see why the coming three-year-old needs special attention.

No one wants to run heifers with old cows. The same needs to be true for the first-calf heifer that is coming up on three years of age. The heifer may never be any thinner until she turns 11. Statistics from North Dakota CHAPS producers going back to 1979 show those first-calf heifers (two-and-half-year-olds as they wean their first calves) are always the lightest in the fall, coming in at 1,082 pounds. Fall is the most logical time to weigh cows and that is the weight which is discussed.

The numbers show the disadvantages for the younger cows. The weights and condition scores are: two-year-olds weighed 1,082 lbs. with a score of 4.9, three-year-olds weighed 1,184 with a score of 5, four-year-olds weighed 1,255 with a score of 5, five-year-olds weighed 1,279 with a score of 5.1, six-year-olds weighed 1,301 with a score of 5.2, and the seven-year-olds weighed 1,304 with a score of 5.2.

Cows continue to grow until they reach seven years of age. Body condition is more constant and levels off a year earlier at six years of age. The important point to remember is that cows are not fully grown as heifers and actually have seven years of growth before they start to decrease in weight. Cows slowly work themselves up to a peak weight at seven years of age and then start to lose weight until they leave the herd. Fourteen-year-old cows weigh the same as three-year-old cows in the fall of the year.

Body condition is held more constant and six-, seven- and eight-year-old cows all have similar body condition scores. However, at 11 years of age, cows drop back to body condition scores more typical of two-year-old cows. Numbers show that young cows and old cows need to be treated similarly

and fed separate from the rest of the herd to maximize performance.

There are few studies detailing the management of old cows for calf production. Most old cow studies are geared to white or yellow fat, but that is another story. Keep on sorting, it's worth the effort.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.COM on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0015.

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Cow Condition and Weight Vary With Age

Cow Age (Years)	Cow Weight	Cow Condition
2.5	1,082	4.9
3.5	1,184	5.0
4.5	1,255	5.0
5.5	1,279	5.1
6.5	1,301	5.2
7.5	1,304	5.2
8.5	1,299	5.2
9.5	1,286	5.1
10.5	1,265	5.0
11.5	1,267	4.9
12.5	1,236	4.7
13 +	1,206	4.4
Avg	1,249	5.3

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