

NEWS

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BeefTalk: Plan Cow Herd Replacement by Evaluating CHAPS Data

**By Kris Ringwall, Extension Beef Specialist,
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It's not too late to get a handle on the number of cows you want to over-winter.

With the onset of the cold weather, there seems to be a lot more cows looking for feed. And as the third trimester of pregnancy begins for the majority of cows in North Dakota, dinner plates need to be full and well balanced. You are feeding all the food groups, aren't you?

Spring is too late to be asking yourself how many cows should be in the herd. By now, most producers have done the obvious and let go open cows (about 5 percent of the cow herd), those with structural or physical defects (1.4 percent) and old, emaciated cows (2.3 percent).

At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, we sort those cows as we

wean and the trailer is on the road to the auction barn the next day. Since the trailer went to town, we have had three weeks to process the Cow Herd Appraisal and Performance Software (CHAPS) records and fully evaluate last year's production. Now is time to sell the bred cows that would qualify as replacements (2.1 percent) in another herd or low performing cows (1.3 percent of the cow herd).

Our goal is to regroup the cow herd, start calving March 1 and be done by April 15 with the mature cow herd. After evaluating when each cow calved last year, cows that are not predicted to meet those dates are sorted for one of the good cow sales coming up. There is nothing wrong with the cows, they just aren't calving when the Center needs them to calve.

The best way to narrow your calving dates is to find the third mature cow (don't use heifer calving dates) that calved in your calving book, note when she calved last year and count down 45 days from that date and draw a line. Sell those late-calving cows below that line.

Personally, I don't ever have a problem getting rid of cows that don't calve when they should. No one has all spring to calve and a good goal is to have 90 percent of your cows calved in 45 days. Calves are variable enough in the fall without having excessively long calving seasons. Now is a good time to add up how many cows are left, and how many more you would like to sell. Keep in mind that it is always best to plan to feed until spring turn-out (early May for cool season grass, early June for native grass).

The length of winter feeding is always determined by when winter starts, not when it ends. Look over at the feed pile and mentally ponder just how long this winter will be. Do you have enough feed laid in for the number of cows? If not, you may want to take another look at those cows 10 years or older

and cull some more of the thinner ones.

And, finally, sort off the poor performing cows -- low MPPA (most probable producing ability) or low EPD (expected progeny difference) for weaning weight. These are the cows that weaned lighter calves based on 205-day adjusted weaning weights. After this cut, the only cows remaining in the herd are those that calve early and produce good calves. That should make things fun at calving time come spring.

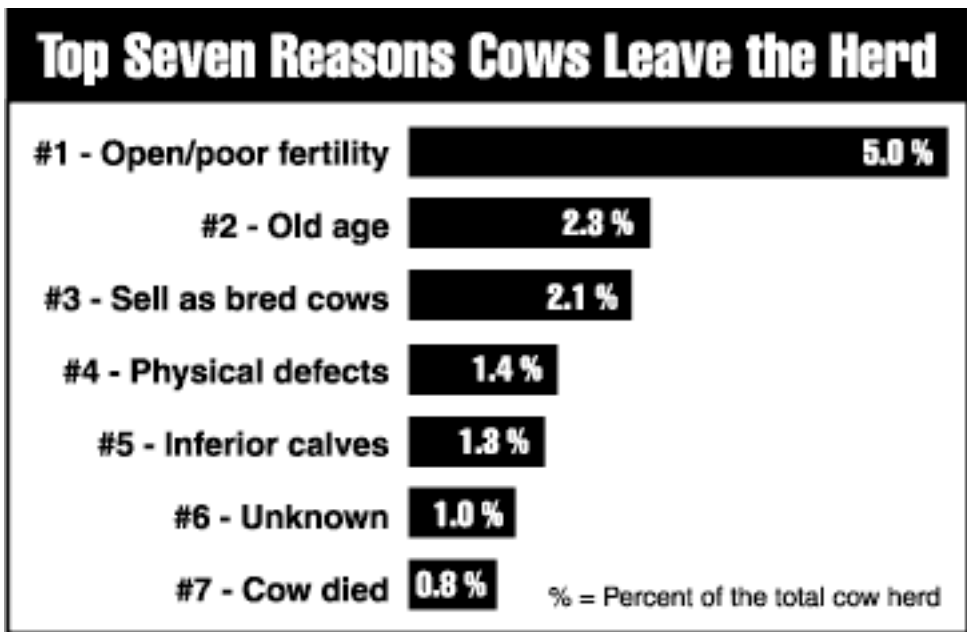
May you find all your ear tags.

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 BT0017.

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