

# NEWS

North Dakota State University -- **NDSU Agriculture  
Communication**

7 Morrill Hall, Fargo ND, 58105-5655, Tel: 701-231-7881, Fax: 701-231-7044

[agcomm@ndsuxext.nodak.edu](mailto:agcomm@ndsuxext.nodak.edu)



## **BeefTalk: Consider Production Potential When Buying Cows**

**By Kris Ringwall, Extension Beef Specialist,  
NDSU Extension Service**

This is the time for good cow sales and the \$64 question is: How do you determine what a good cow is worth?

The classic answer is whatever the highest bidder will pay. But there is more to the true value of a good cow. The value should reflect the demand and supply status of the cattle cycle. If these principles are ever in doubt, you only need to visit the public auction livestock facilities.

While demand and supply may drive the price, the value of a good cow is based on what a good cow can produce.

Often cows are sold based on breed type, size, or age with very little real evidence of expected performance or potential output. Knowing what a

particular cow will produce is difficult without adequate individual performance data.

Data collected in the CHAPS program through the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association gives us a look at how some of the age groups of cows that are enrolled in the program have performed. These averages are not for the purpose of indicating what one can pay for cows, but only an indication of average performance differences between cow ages. Also listed is the typical loss or cull rate of each age group (what percent of these cows will not be back next year to calf again). The reason why cows left is not noted, only the fact that the cows are no longer present in the herd.

A typical two-year-old cow in this data set produced a 561-pound calf with a 14 percent loss (cull) rate. (Two year old weights are adjusted to mature cow calving dates.) If you buy bred two-year-olds, the CHAPS data would indicate that 14 percent of those cows will be in the sale ring within the year, although they did wean 561-pound calves. In general, data suggests calf weaning weight increases until cows reach seven years of age, reaching a maximum of 580 pounds. Calf weight decreases slightly faster than it increased.

The loss (cull) rate of cows seems to be around 10 to 15 percent when buying seven-year-old cows or younger. It is quite another story when you start buying eight-year-old cows or older. If you are buying cows, you will want to factor these statistics into your purchase price equation. Keep these following facts in your pocket book.

The following are the respective calf weights and cow loss rates for all the cow ages:

- Three-year-old cows produced 538 pounds of calf with a 16 percent loss rate.
- Four-year-old cows produced 560 pounds of calf with a 9.5 percent loss rate.
- Five-year-old cows produced 574 pounds of calf with a 10 percent loss rate.
- Six-year-old cows produced 578 pounds with a 13.7 percent loss rate.
- Seven-year-old cows produced 580 pounds of calf with a 14.6 percent loss rate.

From this point on calf weight weaned decreases and the loss rate of the cows increases. A typical 14-year-old cow produces 518 pounds of calf with a loss rate of 66.7 percent.

Watch what you pay for old cows.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://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](http://www.CHAPS2000.COM) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0017.

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**Source:** Kris Ringwall, (701) 483-2045, [kringwal@ndsuext.nodak.edu](mailto:kringwal@ndsuext.nodak.edu)  
**Editor:** Tom Jirik, (701) 231-9629, [tjirik@ndsuext.nodak.edu](mailto:tjirik@ndsuext.nodak.edu)

## Average Cow Productivity

North Dakota Beef Improvement Federation

Cow Age (Years)	Pounds of calf weaned	Percentage of Cow loss
2	561*	13.8
3	538	16.0
4	560	9.5
5	574	10.5
6	578	12.7
7	580	14.6
8	573	19.7
9	564	23.0
10	556	36.2
11	546	40.0
12	528	56.0
13	526	62.5
14	518	66.7

\* Adjusted to mature cow calving dates

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