

NEWS

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BeefTalk: Count Those Cows – And Determine Your Hay Needs

**By Kris Ringwall, Extension Beef Specialist,
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It is the end of the year-and that means inventory time. That is no different in the beef business than it is any other business.

Inventory is kept for most, if not all, record keeping systems and is essential to the management of any operation. Placing values on various items within the operation and adjusting for changes in inventory is needed to truly measure economic and financial viability. The details and parameters for economic and financial viability, however, will be saved for another day. Today let's focus on how taking an inventory allows for intelligent management decisions.

The major item on my mind today is just how many mouths are we feeding. At the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension

Center, this is ultimate question: Is there enough feed to get the center's cows to the first week of May when they can be turned out on crested wheat grass?

It seems like livestock inventory is always changing. If you don't believe me, try and fill out one of those forms that ask when you sold livestock. Those sale slips start adding up, especially the culls. The slips that you have are great but when you subtract the current inventory from previous inventory and you are still short cows, you start to scratch your head.

At the Center, last year at this time we had 372 pregnant cows, and this year we have 405. Last year we had 111 calves in the lots and this year we only have 89. The majority of the calf crop is sold locally or on feed at the Decatur County Feedyard near Oberlin, Kan. Last year we had 215 calves on feed in Decatur County and this year 118 steers arrived in Decatur County on Dec. 15. The off-the-truck-weight was 80,795 pounds, or 684.7 pounds apiece.

Are these numbers important? You bet! I would like to know how many times I've been told how good last year's calf crop was or this is the worst winter we've have ever had. Is it the best calves we have ever seen? Is it the worst winter? We have very selective memories-we remember what we want to remember, and generally embellish our memories so that they may be the seeds of good stories. The bottom line, one written number is worth a thousand thoughts.

Oh, I almost forgot our bull inventory. Last year we had 18 bulls, this year 27. Keeping bulls around is a pain, but no pain, no gain.

I would encourage the continual documentation of cattle coming and going.

The Center is enrolled in the adult management record keeping system and maintains monthly inventories for that program. These require a perpetual documentation of what is coming and going. Oh, I forgot to add the horses, last year we had 53 horses, this year we are down to 35. (Just as a side note, do you know what eats more, a horse or a cow? I'm not going to tell you, but don't forget to figure in the horses when you calculate the winter feed needs.)

Inventory is important because inventory is money and needs to be managed accordingly. I believe there is a critical threshold for all operations as to what is the appropriate inventory to stay afloat and meet the family living draw required to enjoy the chosen lifestyle. How many cows does it take to support a family? Individual producers need to make those inventory numbers work.

Now is also the time to calculate the feed needs for the rest of the winter. Don't wait until the pile gets low to go looking for hay in the spring when everyone else is. The feed required for this year is now a mathematical formula: the number of cows times the daily required intake (pounds) times the number of days to the first week of May for cool-season grass turnout or the first week of June for summer native grass.

Next week I will walk through the DREC feed needs and go shopping for hay. Oh, I forgot, one steer had a crooked hind leg and didn't make the feedyard, so we actually have 90 calves instead of 89. I better write that down.

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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Dickinson Research Extension Center		
End of Year Inventory		
	1999	2000
Cows	372	405
Calves	111	90
Feedlot Calves	215	118
Bulls	18	27
Horses	53	35

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