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BeefTalk: For Beef Producers, Caring for Living, Breathing Animals is Top Priority

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Do you ever have one of those weeks, you wouldn't wish on anybody? I don't mean to say that other careers don't have their ups and downs, but beef production is different. Every single day, beef producers only have one goal--to keep alive and productive those living things entrusted to their care.

The calving season brings home that point more than any other time. In North Dakota, the first two weeks of March is when calving gets into full swing. Expectations are high and so are the sleepless nights. But it's worth it. While looking at the steam rising from a newborn, laying on fresh straw

on a crisp 10 degree day, you can't help but bond to the beef business.

Did I say last week was rough? Yes I did. At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, the cow inventory dropped by four. Let me explain what happened.

Each summer, 30 to 60 days after the breeding season, all cows are pregnancy checked using ultrasound. Cows are classified as to which 21 day period they are expected to calve. The ultrasound was used to measure calf's body length or cranial width. This data is recorded and the cattle classified as A1, N1, N2, N3 and so on.

The A1s were conceived through artificial insemination during the first 21 days of the breeding season. The N cattle are bred naturally to the Center's bulls. The N1s conceived during the first 21 days, the N2s during the second 21 days of the breeding season and the N3s and so on within each consecutive 21 day period. The A1s and N1s for the center were due Feb. 26, the N5s are mid-May calving cows. It's how we manage our cows to bring them to calving in good shape.

Last week, N2 cows were removed from the pre-calving herd and resorted into expected calving pens. This left only 21 N3 cows in the pre-calving pen. Unfortunately, the grain portion of the ration was not adjusted to account for removing cows. The following day, a massive grain overload occurred. Although corrective action was taken, six cows went down. Four of those died.

The surviving cows will suffer the fate typical of foundered cows: lameness, poor feet and eventual structural unsoundness. The situation is like four simultaneous code blues in the medical community with only one crash

cart. With the patients weighing between 1200 and 1500 pounds each, resuscitation was a bet none of us would take.

At times like this, beef producers bond to a life the rest of the business community will never know. Beef producers only have one mission and that is to sustain those lives of those in their care. It is not a question of dollars. It is not a question of performance. Most beef producers take a back seat to no one when it comes to the welfare of their cows and calves.

At the Center, as of March 6, we have entrusted to us 376 mother cows plus 149 calves, 138 replacement yearlings, 25 herd bulls and 35 horses. We have entrusted to the feed lot 118 steers. Every day, the well-being of all of these 841 beating hearts depends on us. So when someone says that beef production is just another job, think again.

When you speak of a beef producer's herd, you speak of the beef producer. When a beef producer loses part of that herd, it is not just another day.

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 BT0030.

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Managing Cows by Expected Calving Date

NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center

Classification Code	Bred	Due Date	Number of Cows
A1	Artificial	Feb. 26 - March 19	116
N1	Natural	Feb. 26 - March 19	23
N2	Natural	March 19 - April 9	101
N3	Natural	April 9 - April 30	62
N5	Natural	May 21 - June 11	20

Classifications for calving date by fetal ultrasound measurements based on a 285 day gestation length.

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