

# NEWS

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

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## **BeefTalk: Not All Make It to the Finish Line, but 2001 Numbers are Good**

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

Not all calves make it to the finish line. The harsh reality of that statement does decrease some of the excitement of the weaning season that is upon us. The cows are arriving home after a relatively good production season and we are preparing for weaning.

A particularly difficult blow to any beef producer's plan is the loss of a calf at the end of a particular production period. That's because weaning time is pay time. All the hard labor and money are spent, so when news of a dead calf arrives the degree of success diminishes. At the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center, calf 1027 died on Oct. 29.

While I await the information on the reasons, a second calf, 1044, is headed to the sick pen for treatment. All the planning and management, at times, does not change the inevitable: transitions create stress for cows, calves and managers and not all calves make the finish line. If I might quote a favorite rhyme, "All the King's horses and all the King's men could not put Humpty Dumpty together again." And so it is with the cattle business. But, to paraphrase another nursery rhyme, the cow did jump over the moon, and yes, this has been a good year.

In the beef business, attitudes are positive and producers are looking forward to a net cash flow. I always wonder why the term "cash flow"? In beef terminology, cash flow would be volume of calf (weight) times value of calf (price) times number of calves. Performance numbers are strong and price looks good.

Our calves averaged 563 pounds about a month ago. Not bad. Most people like to compare the current year to past years. In fact I can seldom remember Dad making any kind of reference to the current year without reflecting on how past years had treated the farm. How do 2001 calf weights compare to the last decade?

Looking at the records from producers who have processed their cattle through the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, calves averaged 568 pounds of actual body weight at the start of the decade in 1990. In 1991 calf weight dipped slightly to 560 pounds, then rose to 571 pounds in 1992 and reached the decade high of 592 pounds in 1993. Since 1993, calf weights have dropped: 1994 calves weighed in at 558 pounds, 1995 calves at 560 pounds and the decade low was reached in 1996 at 533 pounds. As we reached the end of the decade, in 1997 the calves averaged 540 pounds; in 1998, 552 pounds; and 1999 the calves

climbed back to 560 pounds. Last year, the first year of the new century, calves averaged similar to the last decade, 561 pounds of actual body weight. The average fall calf weight from 1990 to 2000 was 559 pounds.

So is 2001 going to be a great year? Well, don't hold your breath. The early herds processed through the office averaged 561 pounds. Given those herds were weaned earlier than most herds, the 2001 weaning weight average should be good, but I doubt the overall weight will top the 1993 average weaning weight of 592 pounds. But the race is really too close to call.

As noted earlier, the DREC calves weighed an average of 563 pounds at the end of September and early October. A good October growth rate, after grazing corn, should push them over the decade high. The final test will come Nov. 7, 8 and 9 when the calves will be weaned.

This week, the chutes will see the late calvers, (May and June) cross the beam. These calves won't have the weight, but at the center we try to wean the late calvers before the rush of the main herd. These mother cows go out to extended winter grazing, only to return when the harshest part of winter sets in.

The feeling of a good year is upon us, and cash flow strong, but remember Humpty Dumpty and put a little away for when you can't find the King's horses or the King's men.

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 BT0063.

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## Average Calf Weight from 1990 to 2001\*



Year	Calf Weight
1990	568
1991	560
1992	571
1993	592
1994	558
1995	560
1996	533
1997	540
1998	552
1999	560
2000	561
2001 preliminary	561
1990-2000 average	559

\* Calves processed through the N.D.  
Beef Cattle Improvement Association

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