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NDSU Extension Service

BeefTalk: Out-wintering Is a Challenge That Presents Opportunities

By Kris Ringwall, Extension Beef Specialist,

We paused for Thanksgiving Day, remembering the things we have each day: the sun, rain, snow, sleet, wind, cold and warmth. I am so thankful for their presence as a reminder of the beauty of nature and all that it holds.

I am also thankful for opportunities to work with beef producers to find solutions for the industry. As beef producers, we truly hold the baton, and from such an orchestra, bring forth sustenance. Thank you, the American beef producer. The world is truly a better place.

This is a special time of year in the northern Great Plains. Fall is coming to a close and producers are shifting gears. This will not be the gradual spring green up or the transformation of summer into fall. No, this change to winter

will be abrupt. This year mother nature has been kind, and provided a breather for producers to get a few extra things done.

For the NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center, the extended fall weather has meant the completion of paddocks for expanded cow wintering studies. Some would call this new endeavor "out-wintering," a concept of extensive cow management, utilizing wind breaks, used tires and hoop (fabric) structures.

I look forward to these new challenges, but having the word "winter" in the name causes me to wonder. But the change is already evident. Last year at this time, as with most ranch facilities, cattle of all shapes and sizes were arriving home and stretching facilities to the maximum. On approximately 10 acres of pens and paddocks last year, we had 200 March calvers, 49 May/June calvers, 72 Fall calvers, 227 March/April weaned calves, 44 May/June weaned calves, 89 yearling replacement heifers, and 35 horses--716 mouths to feed.

I could see them all from a nearby hill--and I wondered, "How much manure will need to be hauled out next spring?" I reached for a good estimate, and obtained daily fresh manure production estimates for dry heifers and cows in the Manure Management Systems Series 2 from the Midwest Plan Service.

Assuming a dry cow is a dry cow regardless of breed type, I would estimate 60 pounds or more of total raw manure was being produced from each animal daily. The daily manure output could easily exceed 20 tons per day for such a gathering. Although most is excreted water, 6 to 8 pounds or more of total solids per animal would remain. If 7 pounds of solids per day per animal was produced, daily accumulation of solid manure would

exceed 2 1/2 tons per day. These estimates can vary tremendously, depending on individual bedding and feeding situations.

This year, however, all the cows, heifer calves, bulls and replacement females are at the out-wintering facility. The out-wintering facility makes use of 320 acres of primarily crop land, which welcomes the addition of 2 to 3 tons of nutrient-laden solid manure daily.

The Center headquarters is preconditioning 156 steers, has a few odds and ends, as well as 17 saddle horses in residence--a much different environment from last year.

Is the Center better off? Well, remember our name is the NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center. The answer to that question remains to be known.

The challenges, if handled properly, are really opportunities for all of us. One cannot schedule opportunity and must react appropriately when presented with such. The out-wintering facility, which can cause worry, is our opportunity to meet the challenges of a changing beef industry--and help producers deal with some issues. Together, we can move forward.

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 BT0066.

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Daily Fresh Manure Production for Cattle		
	Heifers	Dry Cows
Stage of production size	750 lbs	1000 lbs
Daily manure output	62 lbs	63 lbs
Water percentage	92 %	88 %
Total solids	5.8 lbs	7.7 lbs

Source: Manure Management Systems Series –
Midwest Plan Service, 2000, Iowa State University Ames Iowa

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