

## Improve Calving Distribution by Proper Winter Management

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The fall of the year is performance evaluation time when calves are weighed, processed and visually appraised at the chute. By now, the actual data should be filtering back in report form to verify visual judgments. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of the beef industry ever enters the domain of performance reports--the actual black and white reports that verify the performance of the herd.

The summary reports should contain a total synopsis of the herd, allowing quick assessment of total herd performance. The performance report allows producers to take appropriate management action. For example, the calving distribution table is an often under-utilized part of the performance report.

In reviewing the Cow Herd Appraisal and Performance Software Program (CHAPS) report for the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center, the calving distribution table presents a weaning weight summary for each age of cow within the herd. In addition, the calving distribution report notes how many cows calved within each 21 day period of the calving season for each age group.

For our herd, the average calving date for the three-year-old cows was March 21. The four-year-olds' average calving date was March 26, with the five-, six- and seven-year-olds leveling the calving date off at March 28, 29 and 26, respectively. (First-calf heifers had an average calving date of March 3 but they are bred early so they calve early. First calf heifers--and in most cases their calves--have much different care and nutritional needs.)

From a management perspective, the center's cows reached a consistent calving date when they reached four years old. Perhaps more attention needs to be given to the younger cows in the herd or, if the inputs don't allow increased attention, the slip in calving date may simply need to be noted by the manager.

Delayed calving does cost pounds. On the same

table, I can find out the actual number of pounds lost because of later calving by viewing the average calf weight by 21-day calving periods. The calf weaning weight from those cows that calved in the first 21 days of the calving season was 556 pounds. Those cows calving during the second 21-day period of the calving season averaged 516 pound calf weaning weights and those cows calving within the third 21-day calving period averaged 468 pounds.

I realize not all the calves can be born during the first 21 days of the calving season, however, the degree of effort put forth to keep cows calving early within your chosen calving season needs to be proportional to the amount of weight lost in the lighter calves. We give up 40 pounds for every calf delayed into the second cycle and 88 pounds of calf for every one delayed into the third cycle. The majority of our calves are born the first 21 days, 150 head, with 94 calves born during the second 21 days and 23 during the third 21 days.

Adding up the weight loss, 94 calves were 40 pounds lighter for a total 3,760 pounds and 23 calves were 88 pounds lighter for a total of 2,024 pounds. The total non-marketed weight for the herd was 5,784 pounds if all the calves are sold on the same day.

Lighter calves may bring more dollars per pound to help offset some of the loses, but they don't bring more dollars per head. However, the over-riding principle is one of constant pressure within a cow herd to keep cows calving early. Now is the time to review your calving distribution, and if your not satisfied take measures to improve cow condition. After calving next spring is simply too late. 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 BT0120.

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## 2002 Average Calf Weaning Weight

<b>Calving Period</b>	<b>Number of Calves</b>	<b>Average Weaning Weight</b>	<b>Difference From First 21 Days</b>
First 21 days	150	556	0
Second 21 days	94	516	-40
Third 21 days	23	468	-88

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