
Heifers Are Half Done Calving Before Their Expected Calving Date

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We are less than three weeks from the end of winter and record lows are claiming what is left of a reasonably mild season. The minus 35 degrees reported the other morning caused us second thoughts about those producers whose cows were already calving.

As last week closed out, the anticipation of calving season gave way to active calving for us. Interestingly, the heifers were due to begin calving on Feb. 23. Last spring, when the weather was warm, the heifers received an injection of prostaglandin on May 13, with active breeding starting on May 15 and continuing through May 17.

Based on a 283-day gestation table, the big event was planned. However, Mother Nature is never predictable. This year the heifers started out nine days early with a bang: three calves on the afternoon of Friday, Feb. 14 and six more the next day. The births have continued: six calved on Sunday; five calves born on Monday; eight calved on Tuesday; seven calved on Wednesday; eight on Thursday; and 14 calved on Friday; bringing to 57 the total of calves born before we were supposed to begin calving.

Sixty heifers have already calved prior to the expected calving date (283 days post breeding), so calving should be easier this year. We won't need nearly as many calving pens with 57 of the 120 heifers due to calve already calved. (Sorry for being a little sarcastic, but the cow continues to stay one step ahead of technology.)

In general, the season has been going well, with only seven difficult births. The average birth weight has been 74.5 pounds, with six calves weighing in at 90 or more pounds. Of the heavier calves, two were difficult pulls and were sired by two of the three bulls utilized last spring. Five calves have died: one was a malpresentation, two calves were from two sets of twins, one was a difficult delivery and the latest was a birth in which the calf was born under the fence.

Despite a rigorous effort at successfully calving heifers, failure seems to lurk close by. Every calf that dies takes a bit of the manager with it. If problems can happen, they will, and the ramifications are frustrating. But in the

calving business, there is always another cow, and time does not stand still. Obviously, the future is the only place to go, and the evaluation of this year's bulls aids in the selection of next year's bulls.

A majority of this year's calves from heifers are products of three Angus bulls: AAA 11783725, AAA 13384754 and AAA10312571. These bulls have EPD values for birth weight of -0.3, +2.0 and +0.0, respectively. In previous years these bulls had average birth weights of 75 pounds, 75 pounds and 81 pounds, respectively.

Given the average birth weight is 74.5 pounds this year for the Dickinson Research Extension Center herd, these bulls are quite predictable for use on heifers. The Center will continue to select bulls for calving ease based on the EPD value of the bulls. All three of these bulls are AI bulls with high accuracy. Two of the bulls have accuracy values over 0.99 and the other bull has an accuracy of 0.84 for birth weight.

Yearling bulls do not have the high accuracy values of proven AI sires. Yet, none the less, major calving difficulty can be reduced to an infrequent event when appropriate bulls are selected with proven genetics. By utilizing lower EPD birth weights, the incidence of calving difficulty with yearling sires can be reduced.

Producers realize every cow and calf is unique, and no amount of planning will ever totally eliminate calving problems. Parturition is a normal process for starting life outside the uterus, and life is not without risk, even at the get go.

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 BT0132.

2003 Current Calving Statistics

Predicted calving start date	February 23
Actual calving start date	February 14
Calved by predicted start date	50 %
Current average birth weight	74.5 pounds
Heifers with difficult pulls	12 %

NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center