

Early Pregnancy Checking Can Increase Sale Options

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A pregnant cow is necessary to create another generation of beef. At the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center, we get serious about pregnancy checking at this time of the year.

Historically, the cattle industry checks for pregnant cows in the fall. This timing evolved from some logical thinking. Cows need to be gathered to wean calves and cull cows, so for many producers it makes sense to pregnancy check at the same time. There are still producers who don't pregnancy check. They simply wait for spring to sell off the open cows into, hopefully, a slightly higher cow market.

The basic principle involved in keeping cows is based on a dollar bill. I will make the broad generalization and figure one dollar a day in relationship to cow costs. In other words, every day a cow is on the place, more than likely, the center will spend a dollar to keep her. (Hopefully each producer knows what their daily cost is, but for this discussion I will keep the dollar in mind.)

If the center sells a cow or heifer from the breeding herd today, all expenses attributed to those animals end. If I delay the decision for 30 days, the cow or heifer needs to bring in an additional \$30 to offset the added costs accrued in keeping her.

Cows nursing calves have work to do. Hopefully, the calf is gaining, converting milk and grass to beef and increasing in value. Cows should stay if their incremental daily cost is less than their contribution to the increased value of the calf.

For typical calves gaining 2.3 pounds a day, given a value of 90 cents per pound, the cow-calf pair is gaining more than \$2 per day in value at an expense of \$1 per day. That is a fairly good return on investment.

The point to be made at this time of year, where this example may not hold up, is the replacement heifer. At the center, we keep all heifers for various projects and begin culling now. Recently, a load of heifers was sorted for sale and sent to the sale barn. They were from our

cow herd in a basic Angus/Red Angus/Hereford cow herd sired by Angus or Hereford bulls.

The first sort included 24 black/baldy heifers averaging 894 pounds and sold for \$85.50 per hundredweight, or \$765 per head. The next set of 12 heifers averaged 822 pounds and sold for \$86.00 per hundredweight, or \$707 per head. A set of red white-faced Hereford heifers averaged 871 pounds sold for \$84.50 per hundredweight, or \$736 per head. Two heifers were sorted off for some unreported reason and brought \$79.00 and \$75.00 per hundredweight or \$672 and \$679 per head.

The average for the 51 heifers was \$85.02 per hundredweight at 870 pounds for a total of \$740.40 per head. The market was good. Is keeping extra yearling heifers further into the fall a money making process? That is a good question.

Some would say the heifers could be kept and sold in the fall as bred heifers, however, again using the \$1 a day cost figure, my gut reaction is adding \$30 per month in costs means these heifers need to bring in the mid to high \$800 range to keep pace with costs.

It is important to keep replacement heifer options flexible and be ready to move with the market. Seldom does a producer want to cash out potential replacement heifers to the feedlot, but if the price is right, go for it.

Remember, now is the time to be pregnancy checking the replacement heifers. It provides more options. Only keep the best. And the first criterion for "best" is pregnant.

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 BT0157.

Yearling Heifer Sales – July 31, 2003

Number	Description	Average Weight	\$ per cwt	\$ per head*
24	Black/baldy/whiteface heifer	894 lbs.	85.50	764.69
12	Black/baldy/whiteface heifer	822 lbs.	86.00	706.99
13	Red/whiteface heifer	871 lbs.	84.50	736.45
1	Black heifer	850 lbs.	79.00	671.50
1	Red/whiteface heifer	905 lbs.	75.00	678.75
Average		870 lbs.	85.02	740.40

* Figures may not calculate exactly due to rounding.

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