

## Acceptable Means Raising a Calf With Marketability

By Kris Ringwall  
Extension Beef Specialist  
NDSU Extension Service



Maintaining the cowherd is a simple statement but not really an obvious direction. As time passes, more and more detail is added to the formula and new ideas tend to add complexity. The bottom line in any beef operation, however, is cows need to reproduce in a timely manner and produce an acceptable calf.

Acceptable is a subjective decision by each manager. There are, however, benchmarks available to further define acceptable. The Cow Herd Appraisal Performance Software (CHAPS) data collected by the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association provides a good look at the data. For many Midwestern beef producers, the cow herd should be 57 percent calved within 21 days of the start of calving mature cows and 84 percent calved within 42 days.

Heifers follow a different man-made pattern. Since a general practice is to calve the heifers before the mature cows, typically 34 percent of the heifers calve before the start of the mature cows, with 69 percent calved out by the end of first 21 days of calving mature cows and 85 percent calved out by the end of 42 days of calving mature cows. The heifers are blending into the mature cow calving season, using the mature cows as the base.

Interestingly, even with a jump-start for heifers, after 42 days of calving (using the mature cows as the base), only 85 percent of the cows are calved out, regardless of first calf heifer status or mature cow status. In the end, cows need to conceive and carry a successful pregnancy.

Typically, in this part of the country, just over 93 percent of the cows actually conceive, with fewer than 93 percent successfully carrying the pregnancy to term. Reproduction in most herds is monitored twice a year: in the fall, when typically 6.6 percent of open cows were sold, and in the spring when dry cows are sold.

Occasional logic will cause a producer to hold over the open cows, but for all practical purposes open cows leave the productive herd. The second time that cows are evaluated is now. At the DREC, spring cleaning is now.

Those cows that are not raising a calf are being rounded up for sale. The current request from the ranch manager is to sell the following on April 29 at the local livestock auction; Cow G7134 ñ aborted, Cow H8072 ñ calf died; Cow J9067 ñ calf died; Cow J9399 ñ aborted; First calf heifer M2020 ñ cull cow, wild, won't take calf, calf transferred to cow M2353; First calf heifer M2030 ñ dead calf, possible abortion; First calf heifer M2175 ñ big calf, hard pull, born dead; First calf heifer M2257 ñ dead, hard pull, suffocated; and First calf heifer M2387 ñ calf died.

The total request is to sell four mature cows and five first calf heifers. This amounts to two mature cows that aborted and two that lost their calves for unknown reasons. Of the five heifers, three lost their calves at birth from either a difficult delivery or abandonment. Life is not fair but it is time to load and move on. Regional CHAPS producers sell just over 3 percent of their cows as dry cows in the spring. The Center is almost done calving 256 cows and the nine cows account for 3.5 percent.

What could we have done different? Looking at each dry cow, was it really their problem? Should we hold them over for one more year? I try not getting too personal with the cows but the stark reality is there are 100 replacement heifers waiting on deck on the hill.

This conversation started as a definition of acceptable, but in this case, more items need to be discussed. At least for now, acceptable does not include dry cows.

May you find all your USAIP 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 BT0193.

---

## Acceptable Values for Herd Reproduction

Trait	Percentage
Overall pregnancy rate	93.4%
Overall calving rate	92.8%
Overall weaning rate	90.3%
Percent Mature Cows Calving	
Within 21 days	57%
Within 42 days	84%
Percent Heifers Calving	
Early (before mature cows)	34%
Within 21 days	69%
Within 42 days	85%

Based on CHAPS Benchmarks  
[www.chaps2000.org/benchmarks.htm](http://www.chaps2000.org/benchmarks.htm)