
Beef production - Are you in the game, on the bench or in the stands?

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Sire selection is in full swing this time of year. Now is the time to ask yourself, "Am I in the game, on the bench or in the stands?" In other words, just how relevant to the industry are the cattle you produce?

Does the product meet consumer demands? Do the cows meet the ranch demands? Are the calves returning some positive cash to the operation? Could I do better? Have I met my goals? Alternatively, maybe I am just sitting in the stands eating popcorn and watching the beef industry go by.

Serious beef producers need to be engaged. Buying bulls that are relevant to your operation and those of the industry is one of the quickest ways to get in the game. Shop smart and make full use of the data available in sale catalogs, sire summaries, supplemental data sheets and ads as you evaluate the 2005 bull sale offerings.

Bull selection is change, moving a herd in the direction a producer wants to go and engaging the herd in the industry. One of the bigger problems is simply defining the path a producer wants to take and knowing if the herd is about to score or is it still on the 50-yard line. For commercial producers, it is always good to remind ourselves what game we are playing.

Benchmark values calculated annually by the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association through the CHAPS program are good comparisons.

For starters, the current benchmarks indicate that the average CHAPS producer exposed 181 cows to bulls. The cows had an average age of 5.5 years. Of the 181 cows exposed to the bull, 93.48 percent were pregnant in the fall, 92.83 percent calved in the spring and 90.25 percent weaned a calf in the fall.

During the calving season, 61.1 percent calved during the first 21 days, 85.6 percent during the first 42 days, and 94.1 percent within the first 63 days of the calving season. Actual weaning numbers were as follows: age was 195 days, weight was 556 pounds and the frame score was 5.5. These growth numbers translated into 2.90 weight per day of age and a 618-pound adjusted 205-day weight.

For every cow exposed, CHAPS producers weaned 498 pounds of calf.

Using these values, bull buying gets easier. For example, the Dickinson Research Extension Center's current benchmark values are 526 cows exposed to the bull, with an average cow age of 4.2 years. Of the 526 cows exposed to the bull, 87.7 percent became pregnant. Only 256 were kept to calf, with three cows aborting and 10 losing calves. For the center, the pregnancy rate is low and needs to be improved.

The challenge is a lower heifer pregnancy rate. During the center's calving season, 68.2 percent calved during the first 21 days, 89.4 percent during the first 42 days and 96.5 percent within the first 63 days of the calving season. The calves were weaned at an average age of 188 days, weighed 530 pounds and had an unknown frame score. These growth numbers translated into 2.84 weight per day of age and a 609-pound adjusted 205-day weight. For every cow exposed to the bull, the center weaned 439 pounds of calf.

Knowing these numbers allows for appropriate modification through management or genetics. There are no absolute answers to what a particular ranch should produce. The academic answer is optimization. In reality, the need is to grow profitable cattle that a producer can appreciate and still meet industry needs.

Each producer must answer the question, but the answer must be based on data that ultimately tells you if you are in the game, on the bench or simply sitting in the stands.

May you find all your USAIP 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 BT0232.

CHAPS 2004 Production Benchmarks

Number exposed	181 cows
Average cow age	5.5 years
Pregnancy percentage	93.48 %
Calving percentage	92.83 %
Weaning percentage	90.25 %
Calving 1st 21 days	61.1 %
Calving 1st 42 days	85.6 %
Calving 1st 63 days	94.1 %
Average weaning age	195 days
Average weaning weight	556 lbs.
Average frame score	5.5
Weight per day of age	2.90 lbs.
Adjusted 205 day weight	618 lbs.
Pounds weaned per cow exposed	498 lbs.
Replacement percentage	15.80 %
Culling percentage	14.71 %