

Calf Growth Makes the Beef Business

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Growth is a common point of discussion for most beef producers because calves need to grow to make money. The paycheck is the accumulated weight of a group of calves. Accumulated weight, however, does not guarantee a profit. There are several reasons for that.

Calves that simply put on weight in the form of fat generally are valued less than those that put on red meat. Even excessive production of red meat can produce tough carcasses, which are less valued.

Understanding growth has been a topic of study by many. The summation of all the work would imply that calf growth rates are manageable and amenable to different production settings.

From the producer perspective, historically, more emphasis has been placed on preweaning growth, while the feedlots have focused more on end weight and carcass value. In recent times, both segments of the beef industry seemed to have formed an information alliance. More feedlot and carcass information is flowing back to the original producer and preweaning information is shared with feedlot operators.

The flow of information still is not increasing overnight, but the trend certainly seems evident. The North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA) monitors calf growth through the CHAPS (Cow Herd Appraisal of Performance Software) program.

In reviewing from the start of the century, the year 2000, producers that have enrolled their cattle in the CHAPS program consistently have produced good growing calves. The data on these calves can be used to form producer benchmarks to see if your calves are growing in a similar fashion.

Weight is measured in several ways within the CHAPS program. The core weight is actual weaning weight. The calves generally are weighed in the fall, at weaning or slightly before, as the calves are receiving their preweaning vaccinations.

Starting in 2000, calves progressively have become heavier. The average calf weight of female and male calves was 555 pounds in 2000, 562 pounds in 2001, 558 pounds in 2002, 541 pounds in 2003 and 576 pounds in 2004. The five-year rolling average for actual weaning weight was 558 pounds.

These same calves tended to be weaned at an earlier age. The calves averaged 196 days of age in 2000, 195 days in 2001, 189 days in 2002, 191 days in 2003 and 188 days in 2004. The average over the five years was 192 days of age.

Another measure of growth is birth weight. While not all the calves are weighed at birth, the average calf birth weight was 85 pounds in 2000, 87 pounds in 2001, 89 pounds in 2002, 88 pounds in 2003 and 88 pounds in 2004. The five-year benchmark for birth weight was 88 pounds.

The traditional way to combine actual weaning weight, calf age and birth weight is to calculate the adjusted 205-day weight for the calves. The adjusted 205-day weight for 2000 was 608 pounds, 621 pounds in 2001, 629 pounds in 2002, 627 pounds in 2003 and for 2004 it was 653 pounds. The average adjusted 205-day weight for the last five years is 627 pounds.

Cattle have become heavier over the years and the current calves coming out of the NDBCIA programs are no exception. The calves are big, growing exceptionally well and generating a good paycheck. That is what keeps the beef business going.

May you find all your NAIS-approved 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 BT0266.

Typical Benchmark Values

Actual weaning weight	558 pounds
Weaning age	192 days
Actual birth weight	88 pounds
Adjusted 205 day weight	627 pounds

Average values of 2000 to 2004 calves enrolled in the CHAPS program.