

Shrink – \$20 Worth of Under-

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Many discussions are focused on cattle shrink because the market value of cattle is a function of weight times price. Weight and price constantly change.

As a result, cattle marketing can be very confusing because buyers and sellers try to compensate for this change by predicting or estimating values for the factors involved. The same question arises when producers work cattle.

A common and true response is “working cattle costs me money.” This is where good management is needed to decide when one step back results in two steps forward. The Dickinson Research Extension Center faces this dilemma in its work with cattle identification.

When does the identification effort bring a financial reward? Not a simple question, but the DREC is constantly trying to piece together all the components.

Regarding shrink, the center followed 90 head of yearling heifers in a study evaluating the effects of hauling and handling cattle. The yearlings were divided into 15 pens of six heifers and allotted to one of five treatments.

The main focus was to compare shrink. The data provided some insight into the values associated with the hauling and handling of cattle.

Although this data is preliminary and requires further analysis for more specific trends, the research showed that the yearling heifers shrunk 2.3 percent after being transported approximately 25 miles from the ranch to the sale barn and another 3.3 percent on the return trip.

Under normal sale conditions, the owner of the cattle would have lost 2.3 percent of the at-home weight, while the buyer of the yearlings would find the load short 3.3 percent of the purchased weight upon arrival at the lot, even after a short same-day haul. The total shrink from the initial weight to the weight back into a new lot was 5.6 percent.

Although it is not uncommon for buyers and sellers to negotiate these figures, an occasional reality check sure doesn't hurt. Who should pay for weight change?

Probably no one is the answer!

The weight of the cattle is what you have. Hopefully, the price already has reflected not only current market demand, but anticipated shrink as well.

The interesting part of the research, regardless of what was done with the yearlings, was that all the yearling groups were 2.6 percent to 3 percent heavier two weeks later. The group of yearlings that remained at the ranch was 4 percent heavier after two weeks.

Even though all the conclusions may not be in, handling cattle does cost money. Whether a producer does that at the ranch or at the sale barn is really a matter of preference more than a dramatic change in how the cattle shrink.

In this test, cattle that were not hauled had to be weighed to determine the effects of hauling and they lost 2.1 percent. In terms of weight, the return on effort, whether that is vaccinations, identification or other management processes, seems to be at least a negative 1 percent to 2 percent each time the cattle are worked.

Yes, they gain the weight back, eventually reaching a desired weight, but generally they are in someone else's lot by the time they gain the weight back. The bottom line is 14 pounds on a seven-weight calf, 16 pounds on an eight-weight calf.

This weight loss may not seem like much, but it does mount up. To put it another way, an easy way to figure the weight loss is a \$10 to \$20 bill on top of all the other costs.

Working cattle costs money, but remember one step back and two steps forward. Focus on the forward; don't get stuck in reverse.

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 BT0301.

Shrink Estimates for Travel and Tagging

Delivery Time	Owner's Lot to Point of Sale	Point of Sale to Buyer's Lot	Total Shrink	Weight Gain 14 Days from Original Weight
Arriving day before sale	-2.8%	-3.2%	-6.0%	+2.8%
Arriving day of sale	-1.8%	-3.4%	-5.2%	+2.7%
Place of Tagging				
Tagged at ranch	-2.4%	-3.2%	-5.6%	+2.6%
Tagged at sale barn	-2.1%	-3.3%	-5.4%	+3.0%
Control Heifers				+4.0%

Shrink estimates are based on NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center eight-weight yearling heifers. Shrink estimates also are based on approximately a 25 mile haul from the ranch to the sale barn and approximately a 25 mile haul to the buyer's lot. Point of sale is the sale barn sale ring with the start weight the first weight prior to departure of the ranch and the sale weight is the weight on the sale ring scale. Cattle were loaded out the day of sale and arrived at their final destination the same day.

Control heifers were not hauled, but weighed and tagged at the ranch.