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BeefTalk: Life Does Not Come Easy

The cow business can weigh heavily on our shoulders.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

Perhaps the absence of sunlight may be dragging the day down. However, the knowledge that this will pass and brighter days are ahead certainly should reinforce the positive. Tramping through snow (dearly needed moisture), while attempting to get an assessment of the current calving scenario, is never easy.

There are times when reports of twins and triplets certainly boost the available calf numbers, but the loss of any calf is always significant. The greatest impact is standing over a lifeless calf wondering what else could have been done.

Images

Return to Mother Nature

Percentage of full-term calves that died prior to weaning *

2001	3.80
2002	3.48
2003	3.57
2004	3.04
2005	2.85
Average	3.35

* Calves from beef producers utilizing the CHAPS program through the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association

BeefTalk: Return to Mother Nature

nd state fair



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What else could have been done?

This business we call the cow business and our struggles to come out to the good, despite all that Mother Nature can throw at us, can weigh heavily on our shoulders. Some of the more dramatic scenes in many of the popular medical shows on TV capitalize on our human emotion as the scene goes to the ultimate degree to keep life going.

The gallery, not only those watching, but all who are present in the scene, add to the impact of the lost hope, agony and ultimate defeat, as the doctor looks at the clock and says, "Let's call it."

For those out saving calves, the audience is pretty sparse unless one counts the snowflakes. If one is lucky, the ranch cat or dog is not far away. However, more than likely, it's just you, the cow and the dead calf. The cow, even though she soon will be ready to take on an orphan calf, ponders what is wrong with the lifeless calf as this not so welcome human intercedes.

Life must go on, but that does not make the job easy. The masses, all those pending consumers, never get the point that somewhere, sometime, someone brought a life into this world that ultimately provides our tomorrow. A great moment, but not all the moments are great. If one is not careful, the whistle in one's voice that is so prevalent when the first calves hit the ground is long gone. The smell of soiled coveralls, the feel of perpetual dampness and the ultimate stickiness of

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things best never served on a plate tend to grind on even the most optimistic producer.

One certainly does wonder just what is good and what is bad. If we turn to some typical commercial herds that are involved with CHAPS and the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, the percentage of calves that die, based on the number of full-term calves born, is 3.35 percent.

In other words, for every 10,000 calves, 335 die. One could say that is acceptable, if one accepts that death is inevitable, at least at some time. If one looks back on the last five years, the percentage of calves that died prior to weaning was 3.80 percent in 2001, 3.48 percent in 2002, 3.57 percent in 2003, 3.04 percent in 2004 and 2.85 percent in 2005.

Granted, most of these calves died during calving and that is what is. The bottom line, one can't despair, but nevertheless, for every 10,000 calves born, there are 335 returning to Mother Nature sooner than we would like. The 10,000 calves would be a couple of good sale days at a typical livestock auction in the fall.

As the trucks line up to haul the calves off, it would take, given a typical weight of 562 pounds around weaning time, 112 trucks loading around 50,000 pounds of calf to haul the calves to their next destination. As for the 335 dead calves, four trucks would remain empty. Chin up, the calves that

make it will have a good start on fresh grass. Life does not come easy.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at

<http://www.BeefTalk.com>. For more information,

contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave.,

Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to

<http://www.CHAPS2000.COM> on the Internet.

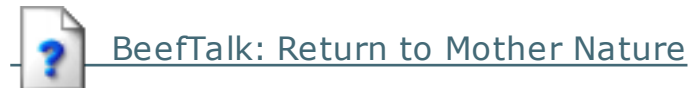
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