

## Buy a Scale

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The beef industry has been producing beef since the first two cows were domesticated. We hope one cow produced a heifer to be kept as a replacement and the other cow produced a bull calf suitable for harvest.

In the early days, calf size would have been noticed, if for nothing else, because of the number of people who could be invited over for pot roast. Through the years, weight and frame still remain critical to the success of a commercial beef operation.

Through time, calves and cows got bigger in weight, muscle and frame. The current benchmarks for those who use the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association CHAPS program would suggest that a typical cow would weigh 1,413 pounds and have a 5.5 frame score.

These cows would be producing 566-pound steers at 189 days of age. The heifers would weigh 546 pounds and the bulls would weigh 621 pounds. These calves would be gaining 2.53 pounds per day or have a weight per day of age of 3 pounds as they grazed summer pastures. (The difference between average daily gain and weight per day of age is that weight per day of age includes birth weight.)

Watching calves going through the local auction barn the other day, the lots did seem to be somewhat on the light side. The published sale report in the local paper reported a total of 126 lots of steer calves. Fifty-one of the 126 lots had an average weight that was less than the typical weight seen in the CHAPS calves prior to weaning.

While this is not a direct comparison and is not intended to be, one notable fact was that 11 lots of calves did not break 400 pounds and 35 lots did not break 500 pounds. Actually, the calf weights were not that atypical of a spread in weight seen at many sales through time. However, producers do need to be careful, especially as they talk about calving later and producing lighter calves.

Those 400-pound calves at \$1.33 would gross \$532 dollars per head. During the same sales, there were 23 lots of calves that weighed in at more than 650 pounds. For a typical 650-pound calf bringing in the neighborhood of \$1.14, the gross dollars would be \$741 per head, a difference of more than \$209 per head gross.

If one really knew the expenses and the production data, a stronger statement could be made. Historically, light calves bring great dollars per pound, but the heavy calves bring home the big dollars.

There is real merit in calving at a time of the year when the weather is more cooperative, the pressure is taken off the winter feed supply, more cows are calving closer to pasture turnout or cows are on pasture. However, producers must remember that the lack of a management plan with light-weight calves simply hands the opportunities to the next owner.

Given the current benchmark for calves grazing on grass with their mothers, simple math (using weight per day of age of 3 pounds) will estimate an approximate weight. If the sale date is Oct, 27, a calf born March 1 would be 240 days old and could weigh 720 pounds. A calf born April 1 could weigh 627 pounds, while a calf born on May 1 could weigh 537 pounds.

There are many sides to the equation, but the expense side and income side always seem to be battling. Now is a good time to think through just what generates dollars in the beef business. If one is in doubt, buy a scale.

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 Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

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## **Prewaning Benchmarks**

Average daily gain	2.53 pounds per day
Weight per day of age	3.00 pounds per day

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North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement  
Association CHAPS program calves.