



BeefTalk: Cow Size – A Foundational Issue

Knowing the weight of the cows being turned out to grass is something every producer needs to know.

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As the search for grass and feed continues, one needs to reflect on research regarding cow size. The simple answer is that one size does not fit all operations.

While sorting cows and calves for spring and summer pasture, one needs to make sure managerial desires are in concert with biology. This is especially important in dry areas, which is what we are facing at the Dickinson Research Extension Center.

The quantity of daily intake is a factor and the amount an individual cow eats is very influenced by total body weight. Overstocking of body weight in cows is a serious concern for range managers.

There has been much time spent discussing the merits and nonmerits of various weight cows. Are 1,200-pound cows better than 1,300-pound cows? How big are cows?

The answer to the question is irrelevant because the question is wrong. Just how big are the cows I am turning out to pasture is the real question.

Many things affect cow size. The first factor is age. Breed, location, nutritional history and many other factors ultimately combine to produce a cow that is standing at the gate ready to go to spring and summer pasture.

So back to the real question. How big are the cows that are going to be turned out this spring? At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, we monitor cow weight and adjust the stocking rate based on cow weight.

As the cows started to line up at the gate, the late-fall and early winter weight sheet was brought out. Want to guess the cow weights? Well, I will save you the trouble and tell you.

Leading the pack and certainly eligible for boss cow status were L1097 (an Angus cow born in 2001), K0326 (an Angus x Hereford cow born in 2000) and L1396 (another Angus x Hereford cow, but born in 2001). They weighed in at 1,935 pounds, 1,930 pounds and 1,925 pounds, respectively.

Next were six cows that weighed from 1,895 to 1,810 pounds. The next group consisted of 24 cows weighing from 1,790 to 1,700 pounds.

There were 30 cows that weighed from 1,695 to 1,600 pounds. The largest group of cows were the 15-weight cows. Fifty-six cows weighed from 1,595 to 1,500 pounds.

Forty-seven cows weighed in at 1,490 to 1,400 pounds and 43 cows weighed from 1,395 pounds to 1,305 pounds. Finally, we get to the category that most producers often refer to their cows as weighing, which is from 1,295 to 1,200 pounds. Twenty-one cows came in at that range of weight.

The 11-weight cows consisted of 31 cows that weighed from 1,195 to 1,100 pounds. The lighter end of the cow herd was represented by 24 cows that weighed from 1,095 to 1,005 pounds. Seven cows weighed from 970 pounds to 900

Images

Cow Weights Late Fall and Early Winter	
Weight Range	Number of Cows
1,900 – 2,000	3
1,800 – 1,899	6
1,700 – 1,799	24
1,600 – 1,699	30
1,500 – 1,599	56
1,400 – 1,499	47
1,300 – 1,399	43
1,200 – 1,299	21
1,100 – 1,199	31
1,000 – 1,099	24
900 – 999	7
800 – 899	18
700 – 799	14
600 – 699	1

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Late Fall and Early Winter Cow Weights

pounds, 18 weighed from 875 to 800 pounds, 14 weighed from 790 to 700 pounds and the lightweight cow weighed 628 pounds.

This herd is not unique. These cows primarily are a combination of Angus, Red Angus and Hereford breeding, with the lighter-weight cows showing the influence of Lowline breeding.

Again, knowing the weight of the cows being turned out to grass is something every producer needs to know. Proper decision-making requires knowledge and cow size is one of the key points needed for good management.

At the center, our research programs allow for the maintenance of several types of cattle representing differences in cow size. However, since all our cows come from industry breeding programs, the odds-on favorite would say all these cows represent groups of cattle that are grazing the grasslands of this marvelous country.

Don't guess, know your cow weights.

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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Attachments



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