



BeefTalk: Cow Size – Big and Very Big Cows Do Exist

As pastures dry and feed sources increase in cost, managers need to review what cows should stay and what cows should go.

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Images

Average Cow Weights		
	herd One	herd Two
Number of Cows	52	50
Average Weight	1,216 lbs.	1,571 lbs.
Weight Range	856 - 1,395 lbs.	1,350 - 1,935 lbs.

Dickinson Research Extension Center

Average Cow Weights

A 1-inch crack in the asphalt made me think this dryness is getting serious. Some have received some spring rain, but many have not, so the waiting continues.

However, the wait does not need to be passive. Planning, adjusting and implementation of managerial inputs should be ongoing.

The new generation of calves is expected to use grass and milk to grow fast and big to pay the bills this fall. To keep the bottom line in the black, producers need to be concerned about expenses.

As pastures dry and feed sources increase in cost, managers need to review what cows should stay and what cows should go. Most producers affected by nagging droughts have sold the old, late-calving, open and other unsound cows.

In many cases, the only cows left are very productive, solid cows. Serious answers will be sought about cow size during the next round of culling.

How big are the cows that are grazing this spring and how big should they be? Good questions.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center turned out two groups of mature cows. The mature cow herd includes all cows except the first-calf heifers, so the cows range from 3 to 10 years of age.

The first herd was 52 cows that averaged 1,216 pounds (856 to 1,395 pounds) and the second herd was 50 cows that averaged 1,571 pounds (1,350 to 1,935 pounds). The difference in the two herds in terms of their late-fall body weight or early winter body weight was 355 pounds.

What does that mean? Two questions crop up immediately. How many cows are we trying to feed and how much do the cows weigh?

There is a fundamental point that needs to be made. Grazing cattle consume grass according to their body weight, as well as production and environment.

There is a relationship that needs to be understood among body weight, daily feed intake and stocking rate. That is why a trip through a scale and to the feed and range consultants all need to be considered as one turns cattle out on grass.

I need to begin with a trip to a good nutritionist to get the right answer, especially since I cannot locate the nutritional requirements for a group of cows that average 1,571 pounds. I can find the tables that go to 1,400 pounds, but since a computer model may be needed to expand the printed tables, a trip to the nutritionist certainly is in order.

Once beef managers dealing with drought get the answers to these questions, solutions to finding pasture or purchasing supplemental feed can be developed. Even though a long series of questions could be asked on the value of cow size, let us all agree that nutritional requirements are a function of biological processes within living things interacting within the local environment.

These processes need to be sustained and, in regard to production, produce a marketable product on top of simply existing. At the DREC, we know we have lighter cows and we have heavier cows and the contrast is quite stark between the two herds of cattle.

Today, I ask which group of cows more truly reflects your own herd. The smaller set of cattle (average weight 1,216 pounds) are traditional Angus and Hereford cattle that have some influence of Lowline genetics.

The set of heavier cattle (average weight 1,571 pounds) also are Angus and Hereford cattle. Their sires were readily available either from local seed stock suppliers or semen out of the semen tank.

Without going into excessive detail, none of the bulls have been purchased based on extreme growth. Next week, let's feed these cows and visit with a nutrition consultant to see what 355 pounds in body weight really means.

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.

NDSU Agriculture Communication

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Attachments



PDF - Average Cow Weights
(bt050808.pdf - 15.42 Kb)



EPS - Average Cow Weights
(bt050808.eps - 205.46 Kb)