



# BeefTalk: Cow Size - Calf Value

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The mushroom season this spring was short. The area is still short on feed and the cow size question remains unanswered.

Like all discussions, the temptation is to set aside the challenges of yesterday and replace them with immediate thoughts. Unfortunately, questions are not answered and yesterday's challenges eventually will become tomorrow's problems if unanswered.

Now is a good time to continue the cow size discussion. The stocking rate question simply will become a question of purchasing hay.

The logical approach is twofold. The first approach is trying to meet the immediate needs of the current set of mother cows. The second is evaluating whether one is feeding the right cows. That continues the cow size discussion.

Many things come into play. There are some overall facts that can be fairly well stated.

The more difficult part of the discussion is evaluating traits through inter-relationships among the traits and within the environment in which the cattle are being produced. Cow and calf size are easily noticeable while cow milking ability cannot be observed except for a brief period at calving.

Cow size is not simply weight since cows may be thin or fat on a short or tall frame. The bottom line is finding the right cow that can survive, raise a marketable calf and be reasonably efficient on the resources available.

Those resources quickly are becoming economically challenged. The necessity of addressing the long-term needs of the herd no longer can go into next week's discussion.

The right cow is not extreme in any trait, but one that combines several traits into one efficient working unit. The unit needs to be bred to a bull that will settle the cow and add value to the calf, which, in the end, will pay the bills.

Just today, the closeout arrived for the final set of steers from last year's calf crop. The first figure I always look at is death loss. This set of 55 calves made it through the feedlot with no deaths.

Death loss for the calves at the Dickinson Research Extension Center never has been an issue. However, dead calves take chunks out of net return. In this case, the calves averaged \$33.82 net return per head.

The calves were sent to the lot on Jan. 15 and weighed in at 758 pounds (pay weight). The calves were valued at \$98 per hundredweight. Doing the math, they were valued at \$742 at arrival, plus \$33.82 net return in the feedlot, so their total value back to the ranch just exceeded \$776 per head.

Being a data person, I could look up the significance of that number, but many years have gone by when our targeted value back to the ranch was \$500. So even without the stats, the lot closeout was good.

True net return to the cow has not been figured yet because variable and fixed costs need to be subtracted for the cow

and bull to determine the ranch net return. However, in terms of the cowherd, the more valuable the calf and the lower the production costs, the more net return to the ranch.

It takes the right cow mated to the right bull in the local environment to make the desired net return. These calves had an average daily gain in the feedlot of 4.27 pounds per day. The converted (feed efficiency) dry matter to gain was 4.69 pounds and the frame score was 5.1.

They exceeded the required rib eye with an average yield grade of 2.36 at an average live weight of 1,277 pounds and a 41.8 percent grading choice or higher. Therefore, given the calf value, the cows are still here and will remain.

However, let's not forget we are working on the long-term question. What cow do we need?

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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NDSU Agriculture Communication

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Attachments



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(bt071008.pdf - 16.35 Kb)



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