

# BeefTalk: Pregnancy Check - Better to be Surprised Now Than at Calving

**Keep an eye on what's going on around you and never assume things were done or done right.**

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Fall means gathering the cattle and assessing the summer grazing season. If not already done, calf vaccinations should be completed in preparation for weaning and marketing.

Some areas already may have weaned because pastures are short. Others will be letting cows and calves stay a little longer to take advantage of the extra growth because of good rains. Nobody ever said life is fair.

Either way, appropriate management plans are triggered, so the movement of calves, market cows and bulls is evident. Part of the fall evaluation is pregnancy checking, but those days always are a little nerve-wracking.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center ultrasounds all its heifers and cows. Many times this is done in late summer, but certainly in early fall. The other day, 32 heifers were scheduled for an ultrasound examination in conjunction with a visiting animal science class from Dickinson State University.

The cattle were in the chute and I could not help but note we were starting on the low side. The first heifer in the chute was open. The next heifer arrived and also was open.

Then the third, fourth and fifth were open. By the time the class arrived to see how we do fetal measurements, I still did not have a pregnant heifer after 17 tests.

We settled on evaluating the reproductive tract of open heifers through an ultrasound examination. We carefully viewed the anatomical arrangement of the tract, including the ovaries.

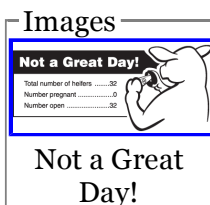
We measured a developing follicle and ended with a discussion on the importance of evaluating bulls prior to breeding. The class continued the tour, including counting the number of ear tags that each heifer had on as we explained the application of a bar-coded tag that collects tissue for DNA analysis.

After the session, the remaining heifers were evaluated and all were found to be open. This was the first time in my career that a complete breeding group of cattle came up open.

The bull had been fertility checked, was sound and at least indicated a desire to mate. However, as is often the case in busy schedules, it is easy to get on with business and assume all the players will do what they were expected to do.

Life is busy. We often do not double-check the previous day's activities. The sun usually is setting by the time we are done with the required checks.

We assume that the cow in heat was a late breeder and will be picked up in the fall sort. We simply are not looking for, nor expecting, all the cows to be actively cycling, especially on pasture where cows are spread out and seem content just doing what they do.



The net result is an additional load of market heifers to be sold. The bull is heading to town as a market bull.

Why not go through all the bulls and sell those that are not going to be used next year? Thirteen bulls were identified to go to market, with the possible addition of two more.

Some would be quick to note that this appears to be reactive management rather than planned management, but with feed short, \$100-plus per ton for hay and \$5-plus per mile transportation costs, the time seems right.

Extra bulls cost money because they are hard on equipment and facilities.

The lesson is to keep an eye on what's going on around you and never assume things were done or done right. Checks need to be in place. Perhaps that is why we call the process pregnancy checking.

However, it is better than waiting until spring and simply assuming the cows will calf.

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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