



BeefTalk: Fewer Cows, Less Feed

Feed and transportation costs limit the number of cows the Dickinson REC can keep for the winter.

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The affects of the drought continue. The cow count must come down and the tough decisions on which cows to sell or keep must be made right now.

In a productive herd, it is painful to look at the cows visually or on records and realize some must move to a new home. This year's fall culling at the Dickinson Research Extension Center needs to be a little deeper.

Feed and transportation costs limit the number of cows we can keep for the winter. Those that are structurally unsound quickly follow the open cows. Then it is the cows with udder problems and the "snorters" (cows with attitude).

The next step is to get the list of cows and sort. The timing is good because the chapter up for discussion in the animal genetics and applied animal breeding class that I teach at Dickinson State University is quantitative genetics.

One of the first principles brought up is that all animals are a product of their genotype (their genes, and environment). The relationship between genotype and the environment is important to understand. When reducing breeding cow numbers, the inherent genetics within a herd cannot be brought back easily. However, the production attributed to management can be.

This is important because a particular producer's management skills can be applied to all cattle in the large picture of cattle production. If one were managing average cattle in times of increased costs, it would seem logical to let the cattle go down the road and repurchase cattle when the time is right.

The management should not change and the expected performance of the average cattle that one buys back should reflect the management skills of the producer. In many circles, this is called commodity production and is a major component of the cattle market.

Many good producing cows go to sale every year and simply need a good manager to keep them in production. However, as times continue to change and the demand for age, source or managerial verification grows, the concept of individual animal inventories also receives more discussion and more producers acquire the tools needed to orientate or focus their production.

Ultimately, genetics that are more refined are present in the herd. If one has invested a lot of time and effort into a particular genotype and spent capital on purchased genetics, more care needs to be taken to assure that the core genetics is maintained within the reduced herd.

When culling, the first thing a producer needs is a list of all the cows in the herd. If the cattle are not available by individual identification numbers along with appropriate pedigree and performance information, there is very little one can do except sort by the eye and hope there is a strong correlation between what one sees and the genetics under the hide.

Stacking similar bull pedigrees will help, especially if a producer has focused objectives and is very selective and

Images

Lack of Feed?	
Dickinson Research Extension Center Inventory Response	
Current Mature Cows	309
Projected Mature Cows	227

Lack of Feed?
DREC
Inventory
Response

thoughtful about what bulls the cows are exposed to. Cows are half the genetics of their sire and, on average, one-fourth of the maternal grand sire. In other words, the cow is her mother's sire and one-eighth of her maternal grandmother's sire.

If one adds up those percentages, what becomes obvious, even in a genetics class, is that the majority of the genotype of the herd is greatly influenced by the last three sires utilized in the herd. Yet, a list of cows with corresponding production history is an invaluable and much appreciated tool when the herd needs to be reduced.

Ultimately, the cow list is sorted quickly. The lower producing cows and those that may not meet the current program objectives are added to the sell list.

The net result is fewer cows, less feed.

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



PDF - Lack of Feed? DREC Inventory Response
(bt102308.pdf - 15.72 Kb)



EPS - Lack of Feed? DREC Inventory Response
(bt102308.eps - 204.88 Kb)