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Beef Talk: The Weather Is Nice, But the Cows Are Thin

Now is the best time for the cow to gain some weight while the fetus is not so demanding.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

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Let's get right to the point. The weather is nice and the cows are thin. Now is the time to feed them.

The harshness of winter will demand more thermal output for the cows to survive. The third trimester of pregnancy and the corresponding accelerated growth of the calf are waiting in the wings.

A good intake of food will be needed to keep the calf growing and stoking the cow's internal furnace. When the calf is born, the cow turns into a perpetual milking machine, which means feed in, milk out.

Now is the best time for the cow to gain some weight while the fetus is not so demanding. She still feels good, not like late pregnancy when she has to carry 100 to 200 pounds of extra weight balanced on her legs and pelvis.

Now is a good time to be nice to the cow and let her gain a little weight and put some flesh on. However, in the traditional timing and business of fall work, it is easy to miss this point.

The philosophy of skimping on feed is counterproductive to good management practices. The other day, I was amazed how thin cows can look.

As usual, the cows were walking up a hill in single file. Their udders were swollen, which is indicative of a recent weaning,

It was easy to be sympathetic. The cows still were on the lookout for their calves. They were thin and lonely.

A touch of a cold northwest wind reminded me that winter is not far away. The body condition score of the cows also reminded me that the cows needed a nutritionist.

Every manager of a producing cowherd needs to understand the annual requirements of a cow and be prepared to have the appropriate feed available. An overlooked time is right now. The cows are thin, but there is not enough nutrition on short pastures or barren cropland. What are they supposed to eat?

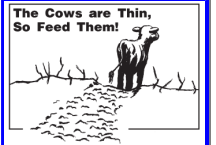
Managers need to set priorities. While caring for newly weaned calves and getting ready for winter is first and foremost, the care of the cows and next year's production is paramount to success.

A common thought is that cows are not nursing calves so they can survive until we need to feed them. We tend to think that is triggered once the ground is white. I guess white equals feed and brown equals survive.

While saving feed is money in the pocket now, it could be costly. A thin cow is unable to add condition and muscle for her wellbeing as the pregnancy progresses.

Once winter gets here (let's say early January), the April calving cows are in their third trimester. The March calving

Images



The Cows are Thin, So Feed Them!

cows move into their third trimester in December.

While one can feed to the nutritional requirements, there are many extenuating circumstances not accounted for. In many cases, the cow is unable to rebuild or add some condition and muscle for her own wellbeing.

This process starts a vicious cycle. The cows are calved too thin, so the calves may be deprived of adequate colostrum and the cow may not rebreed on time to maintain a 365- day calving interval.

If this cycle repeats itself for a year or two, the culling rate goes up and the overall health of the cow and the calf is put in jeopardy.

So do not skimp in hopes of saving a few dollars. Rather, reduce the cow numbers to meet the current appropriate feed inventory.

Visit your nutritionist. Remember, the weather is nice and the cows are thin, so feed them.

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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Source: Kris Ringwall, (701) 483-2348, ext. 103, kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu

Editor: Rich Mattern, (701) 231-6136, richard.mattern@ndsu.edu

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