

BeefTalk: Bedding Beef Cows Is Essential

Challenges around this year as North Dakota and many surrounding areas are living through a tough spring.

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This spring is certainly one to remember. At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, calf death loss is just more than 11 percent, almost quadruple the typical loss of 3 percent for North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association members.

This does not make anyone very happy. In fact, it stings harshly. However, challenges around this year as North Dakota and many surrounding areas are living through a tough spring.

One of the key areas to mitigating calving losses is providing appropriate calving locations to fight severe weather stress. This is critical to calf survival.

Charlie Stoltenow, NDSU Extension Service veterinarian, says, "Prevention consists of keeping the animals, especially newborns, warm and dry. Windbreaks must be provided to counteract the effects of the wind chill."

He goes on to say, "Bedding also is essential. It has two functions. It insulates the animal from the snow and ice underneath the body, which prevents hypothermia and frostbite, and lowers the animal's nutritional requirements. Bedding allows the animal to 'snuggle' into it and lowers the body surface area exposed to the wind."

The bedding process is a chore that is low on the list. The cattle are feed, watered and evaluated on a daily basis. Cattle needing attention are sorted and cared for. As the day draws to a close, the bedding process starts.

It is important to provide an acceptable place of rest for cattle. Calf survival depends on adequate protection and bedding is essential to the total beef operation throughout the production cycle.

Research shows that cattle prefer being bedded and their overall performance and net return improve with bedding. Vern Anderson, Carrington Research Extension Center animal scientist, says, "Livestock perform better when not subjected to environmental stress. Feeding cattle in the winter, with snow, cold winds and subsequent spring mud creates a challenge."

In a two-year study of steers at the Carrington REC, performance and net return was much improved. The steers received little to no bedding, modest bedding (an average of approximately 20 pounds per head per week) or generous bedding (an average of approximately 35 pounds of bedding per week per head).

Images



Calf Survival - Prevention consists of keeping the animals, especially newborns, warm and dry.

Anderson evaluated wheat straw, corn stover and soybean residue as bedding materials and observed that the steer performance was better for wheat straw.

Teresa Dvorak conducted a similar study with heifers at the Dickinson Research Extension Center. She evaluated barley, oat and wheat straw, and corn stover.

The heifers were bedded at approximately 20 pounds per head per week. All the bedding materials were found very similar as to animal performance, but keep in mind the warmer weather in Dickinson.

While the discussion of bedding seems trivial, it really isn't. In years like this, many producers are looking for more bedding, but it is not easy to find.

Dvorak notes an adequate bedding pack takes time to develop within the livestock facility to bed cattle more effectively.

"Sufficient bedding needs to be added to each pen to create a pack," she says. "Once the pack is established, bedding can be added as needed."

There are two positive points with spring moisture. First, grass and grain will grow. With grass comes beef production and with grain comes good straw. Both are needed.

The second point is that excessive moisture certainly highlights the high ground. Start taking notes now to prepare for the next wet year.

Now is the time to start a good pack in lower areas and to start looking for next year's straw supplier.

Bedding at a rate of 20 to 40 pounds of straw per head per week, 80 to 160 pounds of straw per head per month or 480 to 960 pounds of straw per month per head for a good, long six-month winter means up to 150 tons of straw per 100 cows.

The bottom line is that bedding is essential and in years like this, it means survival.

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](#)



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