



BeefTalk: One Needs to know Costs

Calving at a later date gives producers an increased opportunity to place cows on grass while the cow is either very pregnant or milking.

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Managerial changes require a review of both the positive and negative. Previous discussion on changing the calving date has resulted in two major points: reducing the cows' winter feeding costs and lower the death loss among newborn calves.

Both significantly affect the bottom line. How much is also important.

North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association producers have a five-year average of 3.2 percent calf death loss. Those producers have a typical bull turnout date of June 9, with a predicted beginning calving date of March 19 (based on a 283-day gestation period).

The actual average calving date for those herds was April 3, so late March and April calving has not been very harsh on calves.

A storm will cause consternation and even devastation, but calving late enough to avoid winter weather probably is not practical. On May 13, we had snow and chilly (below freezing) temperatures, which were enough to chill a newborn calf.

While things have not been all that bad in the long run, inputs and outputs need to be assessed to evaluate a shift in production practices. The feed requirements of the cow and calf are set. If one knows the situation, the appropriate amount of feed can be calculated.

If the environment is not changing, the requirements will not change significantly. Calving at a later date gives producers an increased opportunity to place cows on grass while the cow is either very pregnant or milking, which are, generally, peak nutritional times.

Both periods require additional feed. If one is hauling feed manually or by the tractor scoop full, the additional feed is noticeable.

Turning cows on grass brings a sigh of relief because the cow actively can gather her own feed. Remember, a cow's requirements did not change, only the source and feeding process changed.

Input costs are critical to any management decisions. Assume a producer can rent land for \$20 per acre on which to run cows.

In a very simplistic way, the producer needs a connection between the available forage and price per acre.

In general, a ranch manager could look at trying to feed a 1,300-pound cow with approximately 1,000 pounds of forage per month (essentially 30 pounds a day for 30 days, plus 10 percent waste). The other option the ranch manager has is opting to turn the cow onto grass.

Images

Selected Five-year Average Managerial Decisions	
North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association Producers	
Bull turnout date	June 9
Predicted start of calving	March 19
Actual average calving date	April 3
Production response	
Calf death loss	3.2%

Selected Five-year Average Managerial Decisions

For the cow standing in the pen, costs are calculated on the price of hay. At \$60 per ton, hay costs the ranch \$30 per month to feed the cow. At \$120 per ton, hay costs the ranch \$60 per month to feed the cow. The lower end barely works, but the upper end does not. The same is true for grass.

As producers compete with each other for grass, the assumed lower cost option (grazing) can disappear quickly with aggressive bidding. At \$20 per acre and with production of 2,000 pounds of herbage (in western North Dakota), the producer is looking at \$20 per ton of herbage available land costs.

However, for grazing, the question gets more difficult. If we stock converted hay land at two acres per head, we are assuming the cow will only graze approximately 1,000 pounds of forage.

Either way, \$20 per acre rent becomes \$40 per cow per month (two acres per cow). One can change the production scenario, but hauling hay to a cow or hauling a cow to grass is totally dependent on the cost of the resources.

One needs to know actual costs. Assumptions can get one into trouble.

Now we need to look at actual numbers for western North Dakota, but more on that subject next time.

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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EPS - Selected Five-year Average Managerial Decisions

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