

## BeefTalk 498: Calving Time, So Far, So Good

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The calving season this year is far better than last year's misery. Perhaps a regretful reminder is in order.

A year ago, the Dickinson Research Extension Center started calving with very mixed results. The season started with a dead calf and went downhill from there. The second heifer was a calf abuser and was taken away. Out of the first 26 heifers that calved last year, difficult pulls, cesarean sections and numerous general assists were the norm. There were three dead calves but the rest survived.

The four heifers that had natural, but difficult assistance when giving birth, had calves that averaged 98 pounds at birth. Of the 21 heifers that had no birthing problems last year, their calves averaged 82 pounds at birth.

Memories are not always golden and, in fact, easily could be left to someone else. However, it is important to write down the bad and the good. With this year's calving season well under way, the initial reports are coming with smiles because there have been no real problems. In fact, at last count, the center has 35 mommas and 36 happy, bouncing babies.

Of the initial 35 heifers that calved, the average birth weight of the calves was 73.2 pounds. There were two light birthing assists and one heifer had a calf with a front leg back that required some delivery assistance.

Compared with last year, the calving results are night and day different. And the lesson is very real as we continue to learn from what we do, along with all the other lessons in life.

Last year's calves were all sired by a bull that is listed in the top 15 percent of the Angus breed expected progeny difference (EPD) for calving ease (EPD 9) and has a birth weight EPD of 2. The birth weight EPD was just above average for the Angus breed and the bull also is a high-growth bull. The bull is in the upper 20 percent of the breed for weaning weight (EPD 51) and upper 20 percent of the breed for yearling weight (EPD 95).

The artificially inseminated (AI) calves this year are sired by a bull that is listed in the top 3 percent of the Angus breed for calving ease (EPD 12) and has a birth weight EPD of minus 2.2. The birth weight EPD ranks the bull in the top 2 percent of Angus bulls for birth weight. Interestingly, this bull also is a good-growth bull because it is in the upper 15 percent of the breed for weaning weight (EPD 54) and upper 25 percent of the breed for yearling weight (EPD 92).

In addition, those calves not sired by the AI Angus sire were sired by Red Angus bulls with an average birth weight EPD of minus 3.4 and an average calving ease EPD of just less than 13.

Not all producers are sold on the ability to manipulate cattle based on EPD numbers. Some would rather lowball the actual birth weight and select a smaller-framed heifer bull. However, it is interesting to look back to review the results based on the printed values of the bulls, particularly higher accuracy bulls such as those available through artificial insemination companies.

Granted, we do not have the same heifers from one year to the next. However, by pushing the calving ease EPD up from 9 to 12 and the birth weight EPD down from 2 to minus 2.2, the difference makes for a much happier calving crew.

Also, later growth has not been sacrificed and the calves will do well. In closing, the same process could be utilized for any of the breeds. The secret is to encourage producers to look for solutions. The solutions are out there in the form of good bulls that also have good data.

What is even more interesting is the hidden problems when a producer pushes birth weight.


The center has not seen any of the long list of problems in the heifers this year compared with last year. Last year, we had weak calves and cows, poor mothering, ornery cows and ornery help. You name it, the center had it.

The bottom line is that a calf born naturally without the need for interference starts life so much better and that is good.

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.



## Bull Pen Change

Early Calving Results for the Dickinson Research Extension Center

2009 — One cesarean section, four difficult deliveries, three dead calves

2010 — No cesarean, no difficult deliveries, no dead calves