

BeefTalk 587: First-cycle Conception Has Been Remarkably Stable

Four Powerful Cow-calf Goals	
Based on Total Cows Exposed to the Bull	
Percentage of Cows Pregnant	93.6%
Percentage of Cows Calving	92.9%
Based on Total Cows Calving	
Calving % 1st 21 days	63.4%
Calving % 1st 42 days	88.8%

If one reviews the data through the last 21 years, what is remarkable is that there are no dramatic trends or up-and-down swings.

The percentage of cows that have calved in the first 21 days of the calving season for the last decade was 58, 60, 61, 62, 64, 64, 64, 64, 63 and 61 percent. The current CHAPS (Cow Herd Appraisal Performance Software) benchmark for mature cows calving in the first 21 days of the calving season is 63.4 percent.

Excellent cattle reproduction is a stalwart trait in the beef business. In fact, the statement would hold that those who cannot maintain acceptable reproduction in the cow herd are not in the cow-calf business.

When one reviews past data on cow reproduction, what is striking is just how sound the cow herd is to overall herd reproduction. Cattle reproduction can be evaluated based on the total number of cows exposed to the bull or based on the number of cows that calved.

The first evaluation really determines estrus and ability of the cows to conceive and maintain a pregnancy. One also may evaluate herd reproduction based on cows calving. Although the actual number of cows cycling and bred will not be evaluated in the latter sense, one still can get a good evaluation of herd reproduction based on when the cows calved.

Based on total cows exposed, typical values for percentage of cows pregnant are 93.6 percent, with 92.9 percent of the cows calving. In terms of cows calving, the percentage of cows calving within the first 21-day period of the calving season is 63.4 percent. The calving season is said to start when the third mature cow calves or is calculated based on a known bull-turnout date utilizing a 283-day average gestation length.

The percentage of cows calving within the first 42 days of the calving season is 88.8 percent and within the first 63 days of the calving season is 95.5 percent. Either way, these benchmarks for cow herd reproduction are very solid and based on the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association's producers who submit their data for analysis within the CHAPS program.

If one reviews the data through the last 21 years, what is remarkable is that there are no dramatic trends or up-and-down swings. Regardless of how one looks at reproduction within the cow herd, the trend is one of consistent, stable reproduction patterns.

To note pregnancy percentage during the last 21 years is interesting. Starting in 1990 and ending in 2010, the pregnancy percentages were 94, 94, 95, 94, 94, 93, 93, 92, 93, 93, 93, 93, 93, 93, 93, 94, 93, 94, 94 and 94 percent.

The same is true for calving percentage. Starting with 1990, the calving percentages were 94, 94, 95, 94, 94, 92, 92, 91, 92, 92, 92, 92, 93, 93, 93, 93, 93, 93, 93, 93 and 93 percent. If one tweaks the data and bases the question on cows calved, the percentage of cows calving within the first 21 days of the calving season starting with 1990 are 58, 57, 57, 59, 60, 58, 57, 56, 58, 58, 58, 58, 60, 61, 62, 64, 64, 64, 64, 63 and 61 percent.

If one wants to look back and see what percentage of the mature cows calved within 42 days from the start of the calving season, the same stable trend is evident. Starting with 1990, 87, 87, 84, 87, 87, 86, 86, 85, 86, 85, 84, 85, 85, 86, 86, 88, 89, 89, 89, 89 and 88 percent of the mature cows calved within 42 days.

Sorry for all the numbers, but in this case, the message is all about the numbers. That is for those producers who have been involved in the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association. The last 21 years have been very consistent in terms of maintaining reproductively sound cow herds.

The bottom line message: If these producers can maintain cow herd reproduction at these levels for 21 years, then those numbers are attainable goals for all beef producers. Accepting low or erratic reproductive performance in a beef cow enterprise is not the proper approach to cow-calf management.

No matter how one evaluates reproduction, based on total cows exposed or total cows calving, four powerful numbers to shoot for are 93.6 percent of the cows getting pregnant, 92.9 percent of the cows calving based on total cows exposed, 63.4 percent of the cows calving within 21 days and 88.8 percent of the cows calving within 42 days.

May you find all your ear tags.