
Evaluate Sire Selection Birth Weights Using Data

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Calving is in full swing, or shifting to high gear. So now is the time to find out the answer to the question: How did last year's bull selection influence calf birth weight? A careful evaluation of the facts is always the best approach, especially after having assisted with the difficult birth of a calf.

Over the years of working with producers, birth weight has always been a lively topic on which most cattle producers freely comment. But many of those comments are not based on actual data. Don't speculate. If you want to know what a calf weighs, weigh it.

Estimated weights or fancy tapes are not true birth weights. Birth weights are not easy to get, but a sample is better than nothing. Since birth weight is not required on all calves, even a sample of calves will give a producer an estimate of the current birth weight. For producers who don't weigh every calf, I recommend selecting one day a week or some preselected dates and only weigh the calves born on those days. If there is a college student home on break or the basketball season has come to an end, take advantage of that extra help and get a true recording of the birth weight of your calves.

Currently, several sires are producing calves in the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center herd. Despite the cold weather, calving has gone reasonably well. My goal is to reduce calf death loss. However, based on the start of the season, I don't believe that will happen.

To date, seven of the 76 heifers calved lost their calves. Two heifers needed assistance with mal-positioned calves, one had a set of twins (both died), and the other four calves were all small. In fact, the average birth weight for the eight calves from the seven heifers was only 61 pounds.

The two Angus artificial insemination sires used on the heifers were 1458 and 1550. The average birth weight on 37 calves sired by 1458 (birth weight EPD: -0.3) is 74 pounds and on 36 calves sired by 1550 (birth weight EPD: +0.9) is 72.8 pounds. In all reality, some of the calves are simply too small.

Although subsequent growth may be good, small calves do not withstand the rigors of winter very well.

First-calf heifers may not be aggressive enough to stimulate the calf and small calves will experience hypothermia quicker than heavier calves.

The mature cows are doing slightly better. We have lost six calves from 130 cows. This is the first year the Center has opted to calve 192 cows in the new DREC out-wintering facility, away from the protection of the ranch headquarters.

What a nice winter it was until the cows started to calve. The cows at the out-wintering facility are only checked in the evening and again the following morning. No night checks are done, since the cows are three miles away. To say I was nervous would be an understatement. Despite wind chills greater than -25 F, only four calves have been lost to date.

Of the cows close to headquarters, only two calves died—one was deformed, the other eaten by coyotes. The latter calf's mother died from a heart rupture. Although it's speculation, I can not help but wonder if the cow died in defense of her calf or her death resulted in a defenseless calf. The Angus artificial insemination sires used on the mature cows were 127, 207, and 196. Their average birth weight was 91.3, 88.6 and 76.5, respectively. Birth weight EPDs for these three bulls were +2 for 127, +1 for 207 and +0.4 for 196.

In conclusion, the bulls worked and hopefully as the weather warms, calf death loss will abate. In the meantime, now is the time to make adjustments in next year's bull line up and finalize the turn out date. As for the out-wintering facility, I plan to delay bull turn out by two weeks.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0083.

March 18 Calving Update

DEATH LOSS

Calves	Heifers	Cows at Out-Wintering Facility	Cows at Ranch Headquarters
Number Dead	8	4	2
Number Born	76	68	62
Death Loss Percentage	10.5	5.9	3.2

AVERAGE BIRTH WEIGHT FOR SELECTED AI SIRE

Sire	Cow Age	Birth Weight EPD	Actual Birth Weight	Birth Weight Adjusted to Mature Cow
127	Mature	2.0	91.3	94.5
207	Mature	1.0	88.6	91.1
1550	Heifers	0.9	72.8	80.8
196	Mature	0.4	76.5	79.8
1458	Heifers	-0.3	74.0	82.0

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