

you are here: [home](#) → [columns](#) → [beef talk](#) → [beef talk: why did the calf die?](#)

navigation

Links

- [News Home](#)
- [Columns](#)
- [Archives](#)

Feeds

- All News [RSS](#)
- BeefTalk [RSS](#)
- Dairy Focus [RSS](#)
- Prairie Fare [RSS](#)
- Economics [RSS](#)
- Renewable Accounts [RSS](#)
- Small-business Savvy [RSS](#)

Twitter

- On Twitter follow [NDSU Ag News](#)

BeefTalk: Why Did the Calf Die?



Appropriate management is crucial on a cattle operation.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

A good goal for calving success is to have 97 percent of all calves that are born walk into the weaning pens this fall.

This can be achieved, although not easily, through appropriate management, working with the environment and a good interaction with industry professionals, including an appropriate health, nutrition and genetic program.

Typical statistics collected through the Cow Herd Appraisal Performance System (CHAPS) indicate a calf death loss of 3.6 percent is typical. Calculate that number by adding up the number of calves

Images

A Good Goal for Beef Producers

97 percent of all calves born, along with 99 percent of the cows and 100 percent of the bulls, will walk into the weaning pens next fall.

A Good Goal for Beef Producers

columns

[BeefTalk: BeefTalk: Why Did the Calf Die?](#) (2017-04-27) Appropriate management is crucial on a cattle operation. [FULL STORY](#)

[Prairie Fare: Prairie Fare: Uncover the Truth of Nutrition and Health Headlines](#) (2017-04-27) Asking questions can help you sort fact from fiction. [FULL STORY](#)

use of releases

The news media and others may use these news releases in their entirety. If the articles are edited, the sources and NDSU must be given credit.

that died and divide by the total number of calves born. But the question remains: "Why did the calf, or for that matter, the cow or bull, die?"

For cows, a loss of less than 1 percent would be a good goal, and for the bulls, it's zero percent.

Death loss goals are contingent on a reasonable culling rate, assuring that bulls and cows are marketed as market beef, not culls. Delayed culling can and will result in cattle that are no longer suitable for the rigorous life within a cattle herd.

A reasonable herd culling goal would be 13 percent. A higher number is easier to attain, but all cattle carry a replacement cost, and transferring a cow or bull to the market pen too early gets expensive as well.

Death is always a downer, but it is part of the life cycle. Perhaps now is a good time to review the overambitious caretaking of animals. The idea may begin with a few companion animals - a dog, a cat or two - and as time goes on, the addition of other animals; a cage here, a pen there and perhaps another pen over there. The care is good, but in time, exhaustion occurs.

Eventually, the caretaker hears a knock on the door and someone asks, "What are you doing?" Caring is important, but no matter how caring, life and death continue to circle. And often, the root of the problem, when there is one, is traced to keeping living animals in too small of a space.

This is true for cattle producers as well. As cattle producers, care and dollars are key parts of the equation. So we should ask, "What are we doing?" If the death rate is greater than 3 percent for calves or 1 percent for cows or bulls, the operation is no different than the situation with an overpopulation of companion animals. Ask oneself "Why?" and do not make excuses.

The first step to any herd program, particularly health, is the matching of the herd inventory to the facility, labor and management. When problems occur, get some input. A knowledgeable, engaged producer asks, "What am I doing?" and listens to the response from those invited around the table.

If the calf death rate is 3 percent, then a positive response to difficult questions is needed. As the death rate increases, let's say 5 percent, then those questions cannot be ignored. Reviewing management, facilities and cattle inventory is critical.

The cattle business is a fairly conservative business operated by fairly conservative people. As risk-takers, those in the cattle business learned that in a high-risk, overpopulated environment, conservative management sustains the operation longer. However, conservative management can go too far when conserving inputs, particularly feed.

Cattle health starts with good nutrition and the

right type of cattle. The objective is a consistent return with an opportunity to be around next year. A review of all the inputs, chit-chat and multitudes of opinion is good, but the review always should come back to the numbers. Numbers mean something and lead an operation so that the dollars can be allocated accordingly.

The wiser, more experienced producers say that with patience comes sanity; with sanity, one still can appreciate raising cattle; and with the correct numbers, right decisions can be made.

So how is calving? Has the weather been good? Are the cows in good shape? Is the nutrition proper and adequate? Are the pens dry and clean? Basically, do the cattle fit the ranch?

Although these questions tend to bring up the discussion of cattle type, the real question is many times, "How many cattle?" As the pressure grows to distribute costs over more units of production, the trigger points need to be set as to when an operation simply has too many cattle.

Is the labor proportional to the number of cows? Is the environment suitable and healthy? Is the attitude at the evening meal one of graciousness and thanksgiving?

Unfortunately, occasionally a reference is made in a positive light, indicating a high number of cows per person working the cattle is the goal. That may sound impressive, but let's not get too excited

until we answer the original question, “Why did the calf die?”

Did we meet our goals of 97 percent of all calves born, along with 99 percent of the cows and 100 percent of the bulls, walking into the weaning pens next fall?

Calf death loss is a function of the management program. Every producer will have a different perspective, with a modification of the goals. But still, start counting beeves.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact your local NDSU Extension Service agent (<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/directory>) or Ringwall at the Dickinson Research Extension Center, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601; 701-456-1103; or [✉kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu](mailto:kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu).

NDSU Agriculture Communication - April 27, 2017

source:	Kris Ringwall, 701-456-1103, ✉kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu
editor:	Ellen Crawford, 701-231-5391, ✉ellen.crawford@ndsu.edu

Attachments



[PDF - A Good Goal for Beef Producers](#)

(NDSU_Extension_Service_BeefTalk_042717.pdf -

14.11 Kb)



EPS - A Good Goal for Beef Producers

(NDSU_Extension_Service_BeefTalk_042717.eps -
203.01 Kb)

