



BeefTalk 635: Pregnancy Evaluation is a Key Management Tool

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



Good News!
First Set of Cows and Bulls
Earned a Blue Ribbon

NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center

Number of Cows	% predicted to calve in the First 21 Days next May
80	84%

All the hard work that goes into developing a functional and environmentally fit cow herd is acknowledged in the fall with pregnant cows.

Next year's planning is under way. Everything is upbeat, and the cows and bulls even get a blue ribbon. Eighty-four percent of the cows are projected to calve in the first 21 days of the calving season next spring. This means that the cows cycled and the bulls got them bred.

This past breeding season was not without concerns, particularly due to the excessive heat in August. The Dickinson Research Extension Center started turning bulls out on Aug. 1 for May 10 calving.



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As cows come off native grasses, each group is pregnancy checked using ultrasound techniques. Although this was the first set of cows to be worked, the positive outcome was refreshing. Typically, if one was to look at reproductive performance within those herds that utilize the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement program, 61 percent of the mature cows tend to calve within the first 21 days of the calving period. Almost 86 percent tend to calve within 42 days of the calving season.

These cows certainly exceeded our expectations. That is good because we all need some good news once in a while. As the cows moved through the chutes, the August heat was still evident because the cows were thin.

One month to go before weaning, these 80 cows were turned out to standing corn to finish out the last month as a cow-calf pair. The calves are scheduled to be weaned in mid-November.

Several challenges face the crew as fall fades. The most critical is water. Not so much the shortage of water, but the ability to keep tanks and ponds free of ice. Literally, the morning check becomes one of deicing.

However, the cattle love this time of year. The summer heat is gone and there is a sense that winter preparation needs to get under way. Of course, that simply means eating more.

For the cows, the calves are maturing and milk production is decreasing, so those extra bites are quickly converted to

some good winter cover, which commonly is called fat. Leanness is good, except for now, because that extra fat cover can mitigate some cold winter days.

Good managers understand that now is the time to start getting the cows in shape for next year. In the case of the center's pregnant cows, now is the time to get these cows ready to calve next May.

The point being, this time of year, if forage is available, cows literally know they need to take advantage of good weather and feed in preparation for winter. Unfortunately, this year it is more difficult to boast of having feed because so much of the country is short, so some pens are empty. In those cases and as part of standard management practices, pregnancy status should be determined in all the cows to avoid feeding open cows high-priced feed.

Ideally, calves should be aged and a predicted calving date established. By knowing these dates, a producer can target higher-priced hay appropriately and avoid feeding cows that will not return as many dollars next year.

If one needs to further reduce cow numbers, select cows to keep that are going to calve during the desired calving time rather than late. Granted, for early calves, such as those who calve in February, the cows are starting their last third of their gestation, so very little can be done.

However, for the more typical late March and April calving herds, November is a good time to sort and cull cows. There is nothing better than to have one eye on the cow in the chute during the pregnancy examination and one eye on the hay pile. If that hay pile is small, the later the cow is bred, the more likely that she should go to the bred cow sale.

At least for the Dickinson Research Extension Center, the cows seem to be coming in bred and bred early. Even the second set of cows was bred well, even though one of the bulls hurt his hip early in the breeding season. In this case, 68 percent of the 38 cows were projected to calve in the first 21 days of the calving season, which is slightly lower than the first set. However, given the known bull difficulties, a feeling of relief was felt as the cows were called pregnant.

With two sets of cows checked and several sets still scheduled for pregnancy evaluation, there is always a good feeling when cows come home pregnant. All the hard work that goes into developing a functional and environmentally fit cow herd is acknowledged in the fall with pregnant cows.

Cows that are not adapted are noted as they go through the chutes at weaning. Making exceptions for open cows is not a wise managerial thought.

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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