



BeefTalk 664: May Calving Brings May Flowers

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Calving Progress	
NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center	
Pregnant Cows and Heifers overwintered	226
Official Calving start date	May 3
Calving progress to May 22.....	138 cows
Total live calves.....	137 calves
Calving assists.....	0 cows

What changed? The center delayed bull turnout to Aug. 1 for a May 10 calving start date.

Change is good. Three things have happened at the Dickinson Research Extension Center besides a good rain. The work environment is more relaxed, cows and calves are doing well and costs seem to be going down.

What changed? The center delayed bull turnout to Aug. 1 for a May 10 calving start date. This is not a new statement, but the impact keeps coming up, as do more thoughts.

The ranch discussion focuses on the occasional problems. Problems always will crop up, but when work, time off and sleep are balanced, people make better decisions. Those improved decisions make for fewer complications and better outcomes, so there is a better work environment.

The cows and calves are doing great. Calving actually started on April 28 with a heifer calving. Three more heifers calved by the time the first mature cow calved on May 3. Actually, three mature cows calved on May 3. If one uses the third mature cow as the official start date for the calving season, the center will say calving officially started on May 3, even though May 10 was the projected start based on a 283-day gestation.

As is typical of pregnancy calculations, not all pregnancies are the same length and calving earlier is very common. The Aug. 1 bull turnout date was selected to try to eliminate any cows calving before turnout to cool-season grass and maximize the number of calves born before native grass turnout the first week of June. Mission accomplished, although we still have more than a week to go in May.

The heifers were turned out the last full week of April and the cows started going out the following week. All the cows calved on pasture, with none in the winter lots. The lots, as many will recall, were inundated with the late April snow and slush, so they would not have been very suitable as maternity pens.

As of May 22, 142 calves came out of 138 cows and more are coming every day. The center overwintered 226 pregnant cows and heifers. So far, more than 60 percent have calved with very few issues. Last week's 3 1/2 inches of rain did not seem to slow anyone up. No calves flooded out and the cows did what they were supposed to do.



Full Color Graphic
[\[click here\]](#)



Grayscale Graphic
[\[click here\]](#)



Adobe PDF
[\[click here\]](#)

A month ago, that would have equated to 3 feet of snow, so one comes to appreciate even more the point of calving in May. If one is going to switch to a better calving season, try to get out of the seasonal transition zones that are so unpredictable.

One day it can be spring, one day winter and one day summer. It all can happen during what was supposed to be a better and simpler calving season. However, the cows and calves are doing great. To be honest, the center did lose five calves. A set of twins was separated from its mother, one was born on the wrong side of the fence and could not get back, one was killed by an overaggressive heifer and one was found dead.

No one likes to lose calves, but in all these cases, one could honestly say that the ranch crew tried the best they could with the best tools available. One can only do so much. Even with the wet weather, not a single cow has been assisted during birth. Remarkably, 17 larger mature cows have given birth to calves of 100 pounds or more.

The heifers are on grass and, other than the one that was an overzealous mother, there have been no problems. They just calve. There is something to the concept of letting cows settle and do what they are supposed to do at calving. They do know how and, remarkably, even the first-calf heifers bond well when left alone. The cow-calf mix-ups and other associated issues of moving freshly calved cows from pen to pen are gone.

I remember the question: Do we really want to put the first-calf heifers on grass? That was followed by: How are we going to get them in when they need help? Well, they are doing just fine.

Keep in mind that, through proper sire selection, birth weights have averaged 61 pounds for the heifers and 84 pounds for the mature cows. Not to sound like a broken record, but May calving has been good.

As noted at the start, costs seem to be going down. Further analysis is needed on financial and economic measures, but the cash side is looking OK. More on that later.

However, not all is perfect. These late calves will weigh less in the fall, and fall weaning and wintering strategies still need to be refined. Nothing is free and neither is calving late. However, for now, work, time off and sleep seem to be balanced and that makes for a better life.

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.

Copyright (c) 2010 BeefTalk.com. All rights reserved.