



BeefTalk 681: Fall, a Window of Opportunity for Thin Cows

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



Thin cows will be thinner at calving unless you do something now.

In a broad sense, a moderately milking 1,300-pound cow would like to eat about 30 pounds of good, green hay a day prior to weaning. After weaning, that same cow only would need 26 to 27 pounds of that same hay. In other words, the cow is no longer milking and does not need the feed, so take it away from the well-conditioned cows and give it to the thin cows.

Each fall, there is a window of opportunity to evaluate cow condition and improve those cows that are thin. All summer long, the cow has been busy nursing a calf and converting

grass to milk. In the process, she probably has used up needed body reserves producing milk. Her fate in the herd already has been set. If she is pregnant, she will be here next year. If she's open, she will be transferred out as market beef.

The point is that the cow needs to do the same thing year after year. Her ability to give birth, to raise a calf and rebreed depends on her ability to sustain her own well-being. The best sustenance for continued performance is to put condition on the thin cows.

There are two very important points: Cows that are thin now will be thin to thinner in the spring if adequate nutrition is not increased now. Also, thin cows do not compete well with cows that are in better condition.

The point that thin cows do not compete and need more feed needs to be written on the barn wall, painted on the pasture fences and noted on all your paperwork.

Why now? Because most cows are entering the second trimester of pregnancy, their milk production is decreasing and the weather is nice. Better yet, for the thin cows, pull or early wean their calves to shut off milk production. As a dry cow, weight gain will be easier to attain, especially with good fall weather.

As a producer, what you do not want to do is compete with harsh winter weather and put weight on cows in their third trimester. The cold nights and dry grass will fight you all the way. In the end, the cows at calving are thinner than they were at weaning. This is something you just cannot let happen because waiting until spring to add weight at calving is



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even more difficult.

What can we do? Visit with a good nutritionist and apply common sense. Standing fall forage or crop aftermath are excellent nutritional sources. With limited supplementation, dry cows will gain condition.

Also, if space and time permit, sort out the thin cows. In most herds, most cows are moderately conditioned and doing fine, while others are on the fat side, if not even overweight. These groups of cows need to be handled and fed differently. The most practical solution is to split the herd at weaning into at least two groups.

Cows that are thin and showing no fleshiness and some obvious rib and bone structure need to be sorted off. These cows are more than likely some of the more productive cows in the cow herd because they put their bodies into raising good calves. Their milk production warrants the extra feed and the need to recoup is real.

In addition to these thin cows, younger and old cows also may be added to this group or grouped by themselves because they are not very high in the pecking order. Mature, bossier cows will dominate their portion of the forage and supplements.

The second group should be the better-conditioned mature cows and should be fed accordingly. This group does not require the greater degree of supplementation.

There is a third group, which is the fat cows. In herds that don't have good records, there can be a significant number of poor-producing cows that don't milk well and simply keep their calf company for the summer.

Don't get me wrong. They are good mothers, but they tend to produce light calves. Granted, this also is a function of frame, as some smaller-framed cows may flesh easily. However, take a good look at their calves. If they are not what you think they should be, those fat cows will sell well.

After all this thought, do something. The bottom line: Don't wait. Fall is the time to bring the cows back into condition. If you are going to buy some supplement, put it where it needs to go.

Move the calves to the lot and split the cow herd. Those needing extra feed should be fed well. For those holding their own, just feed them. Thin cows will be thinner at calving unless you do something now.

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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