



BeefTalk 709: A Teachable Moment

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Benchmark Comparison		
Dickinson REC 2013 May/June calving results compared with North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement CHAPS program users that typically calve earlier in the year.		
	DREC May/June born calves	CHAPS born calves
Reproduction		
Pregnancy rate	91 %	94 %
Calving rate	91 %	93 %
Calving within 21 days	94 %	63 %
Calf death loss	3.2 %	3.3 %
Weaning percentage	89 %	91 %
Performance		
Age in days	171	190
Calf weaning weight	532 pounds	558 pounds
Average weight per day of age	3.1 pounds	3.0 pounds
Pounds weaned/cow exposed	473 pounds	499 pounds

We may think we have covered every nook and cranny in our various management plans, but are we truly prepared for everything?

If the weather can impact calving, the phone will ring and people will want to know how calving is going. For years, I was able to detail the daily struggles and offer words of encouragement. Today, the conversation concerns the needs of others because the Dickinson Research Extension Center will not start calving until May 10. The transition has been good.

There are periods of life where we find ourselves challenged. These are periods the educational community often refers to as teachable moments. Often what we have learned does not become evident until the world around us throws us a curve ball. We may think we have covered every nook and cranny in our various management plans, but are we truly prepared for

everything?

Sometimes we find out we are not. We hope the event that causes us to ponder is not too drastic. We all know, many times from firsthand experience, how brutal Mother Nature can be. This week's snowstorm or last week's or next week's serves as one of those challenges for beef operations.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center went through one of those firsthand challenges three years ago. Actually, the center has faced many challenges in the last few decades, but it was able to manage. The bottom line is that weather repeatedly has impacted our efforts, so finally the center changed.

Was the change to May calving the right one? If the center compares current herd production to the typical values for those North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement producers who utilize the CHAPS program through the North Dakota State University Extension Service, the change was good.

Northern cattle producers typically calve in March and April, so finding data reflective of May- and June-calving herds is



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difficult. However, the center can compare herd performance to March- and April-calving herds. The numbers are interesting and are based on the typical benchmark values for beef production herds.

The center only has two years of data on the May/June calves. Evaluating the current year, the center has a 91 percent pregnancy rate, while the typical rate is 94 percent. The center calving rate is 91 percent, while the typical rate is 93 percent. Ninety-four percent of the center's cows calved within the first 21 days of the calving season, while 63 percent is typical.

The center's calf death loss is 3.2 percent, which is very close to the 3.3 percent that is typical. The center's weaning percentage is 89 percent, compared with the typical 91 percent weaning percentage.

The center's calves were weaned off at 171 days of age, while the typical average is 190 days. The center's steer calves averaged 563 pounds at weaning, while the typical weight is 571 pounds. The heifer calves averaged 498 pounds at weaning, while the typical weight is 545 pounds.

In total, the average weight gain per day of age was 3.1 pounds, compared with a typical 3 pounds of gain. The average calf weight was 532 pounds at weaning, compared with a typical 558 pounds. The herds weaned 499 pounds of calf per cow exposed, compared with the center's average of 473 pounds of calf per cow exposed. None of the calves were exposed to snow until fall.

To recap, as a beef operator and manger, one needs to celebrate a successful battle with Mother Nature. However, we also must always remember that we win battles but Mother Nature will win the war.

With each encounter, an after-event planning session needs to be held. That simply may be a quiet time looking at the cows, sitting at the table with a warm cup of coffee or waking up in the middle of the night with those endless roving thoughts, which are the "what ifs" of our lives.

No matter what the situation, the important point is not blaming oneself for the outcome. It is better to move forward and ask what can be done differently.

Calving is the obvious management practice that uses the most energy this time of year. Regardless of when a producer decides to calve, there always will be some challenges, but weather-related issues can be discussed. The general broad-based response would suggest that nothing can be done. Weather is weather, so do a lot of preparing and live with it.

However, calving date is a management decision. Calving is determined by the date a producer turns the bulls out. If this discussion was to go further and a producer was willing to ponder the question, the second general response is: Other factors, such as cropping conflicts, prevents any adjustment to the calving date.

This second response assumes that all the effort, time and equipment would be required regardless of when the cow herd calves. However, there is a "but" to that statement. What is the impact of the desired management change compared to the present managerial effort? The pondering involved also needs to identify the impacts on effort, time and equipment that would be modified.

Calving in May versus earlier has different demands and certainly different requirements on effort, time and equipment, but it is a good question to ponder.

May you find all your ear tags.

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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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