

March 22, 2001



BeefTalk: Sorting by the Numbers can Relieve Some Feedlot Management Problems

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As I have mentioned several times this year, the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center placed 118 calves on feed. An interim report on the calves arrived in the mail today. The statistics tell a story about the calves and provide information relative to their genetics.

Because there is continued interest in cattle feeding in the region, I'll update you on the status of the calves. The calves were shipped Dec. 15. They averaged 693 pounds, 0.11 inches back fat, and were 46 inches tall at the hip. The calves were fed as one pen until March 6, when they were

reweighed and ultrasounded for back fat as part of the electronic cattle management system (ECMS). The statistics showed calves were gaining quite well.

On March 6, the calves averaged 1,027 pounds live weight and had 0.34 inches of back fat. The calves have gained 334 pounds in 82 days, or 4.07 pounds per day. Not bad, if I must say so myself.

Using ECMS, the 117 head of steers were sorted into five different pen lots with targeted market dates, a unique opportunity to help capture maximum value while minimizing days on feed.

Currently, 42 steers are scheduled to be marketed April 6; 24 on April 20; and 27 on May 11. The remaining steers will be measured again -- 11 at the end of April and 13 during the first part of May.

The pay checks will be nice, with the first group of steers pay weight taken 113 days after arrival in the feed yard and the second group marketed 127 days after arrival. As of the end of February, the DREC feed lot bill is \$16,082.20. I haven't paid a dime, so the first lot of steers will clean the slate and minimize the interest charges.

If you are reading carefully, you will notice the inventory number dropped by one. Yes, calf 0383 in pen 50 died of digestive problems on Feb. 27. When feeding cattle, a one to two percent death loss is inevitable. Yes, bloat can be avoided by not feeding the calves, but this is a feedlot. Feed yards feed cattle, and do their best to minimize digestive disorders. As of today, March 19, the cattle have been on feed for 95 days. I can live with a 0.85 percent death loss. I do have to keep in mind that the feeding period is not over. And the longer a calf is on feed, the tougher the financial hit if he

bloats.

As of Feb 28, the calves were consuming 26 pounds of feed per head per day with total feed costs running at \$1.53 per head per day. This has declined four cents since the last report. The current total cost of \$1.79 per head per day is down by two cents.

Feed Lot performance, just like the entire cow calf business, must be guided by records. When the Center first started feeding cattle, as with most cow calf producers, I got nervous at the slightest deviation. But by keeping track of individual costs of gain and steer performance over the years, you can achieve a comfort level that helps to avoid over-reaction.

The cattle business, in general, brings with it certain risks, one of which is falling on the stairway to fiscal certainty. The steps are slippery if you are in the beef business, so hang on to the railings and remember, you can't manage what you don't measure. Keep your left hand on the management rail and your right hand on the measurement rail, and try to maintain a clear head in the middle.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.COM on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0031.

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Performance Update on Feedlot Steers	
NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center	
Starting Weight (Dec. 15)	693 lbs
Current Weight (Mar. 6)	1027 lbs
Days on Feed	82
Average Daily Gain	4.07 lbs
Target Market Dates	Number of Steers
April 6	42
April 20	24
May 11	27
Reweigh Dates	Number of Steers
Late April	11
Early May	13

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