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NDSU Extension Service

BeefTalk: Get the Most Bang for your Buck: Cull Those Heifers Now

By Kris Ringwall, Extension Beef Specialist,

The days of summer are fast approaching the history book and, for most beef producers, so is the breeding season. At the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center, pregnancy checking is completed for the summer with only the fall recheck left to be done after all the calves are weaned.

At the center, young cows are the most important. We maintained 137 heifers to breed this spring. The status report: 26 are open, seven are too wild to keep as mother cows, one jumped the gate and will need to be relocated, and one has aborted.

That leaves us with 102 heifers suitable to remain in the herd or be

marketed as bred heifers. The number the center will keep depends on the evaluation of all the pregnancy data and calf performance.

The two things not tolerated at the center are heifers that can't conceive after being exposed to the bull for three cycles and ill-tempered heifers. One might argue that three cycles is too long. I might even agree. But all the heifers at the center are given the opportunity to conceive to a synchronized AI mating and exposed to the bull for two cycles.

In the case of wild heifers, I have no patience and neither does my health insurance company. The vast majority of heifers like and respect their owners and caregivers. (In fact, a couple of handfuls of cake from your pickup and you can count on those heifers to spit shine your vehicle.) But the wild heifers are a different story: ears perked, eyes glaring, tail up and bags packed to go anywhere but where you want her to go.

For those of you who palpate heifers, wild heifers have noticeably increased body temperatures. You can feel every heartbeat and, in some cases, a slight twitching during her examination. I recall one heifer a few years ago that outdistanced the horse and riders for several miles, took down six fences and finally ended up in the neighbor's corral, only to frantically jump into the stock trailer. A well-timed slamming of the door captured her just prior to her spin to exit.

Confined to the trailer, she rode to the ranch, only to depart quickly over several wood fences upon release. Eventually, she was returned and released at the stockyards. They have the kind of fence that is needed in these situations.

This year, heifers K0320, K0339, K0340, K0343 and K0348 have all left

for the sale barn due to their desire to return to the wild state. The gate jumper mentioned earlier is yet to be restrained and two additional heifers joined the gate jumper to account for the eight wild heifers.

Interestingly, one of these was subsequently rounded up and returned to the ranch headquarters. Upon arrival at the ranch, this heifer managed to climb into the storage compartment in front of the stock trailer, where she remained until successfully extricated by the crew. There is always excitement in the cattle business.

The open and wild heifers, especially at a time like this, will fetch solid values and will help producers clean up their herds. The net result is that patience can then be saved for something more important. For us, docile livestock are very important. Once selected for our herd, the heifers are similar to kids at the candy jar, or should I say cows at the cake bucket.

There is a time for everything. Put those wild heifers in the feedlot where they belong, and hope like heck that the wild heifers aren't in heat when their number is up, but dark cutters are another story.

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 BT0052.

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NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center	
Heifer Assessment	
Total heifers	137
Pregnant heifers	102
Open heifers	26
Wild heifers	8
Aborting heifers	1

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