

## Cha-ching - Management Systems Impact Dollars

By Kris Ringwall  
Extension Beef Specialist  
NDSU Extension Service



A major concern in the beef business is calf growth. Growth in beef calves sounds like money going into a till: cha-ching, cha-ching. The total sum increases with each dollar added to the cash drawer.

The challenge is to keep an even flow of dollars, or if one is talking calves, pounds flowing into the drawer. This seems simple, but in reality, dollars don't always flow that smoothly and calf gain certainly has its ups and downs.

At this time of year, as calves are prepared for market, the issue of shrink comes to the table. Shrink will bring a flurry of discussion. Before one gets too involved in that discussion, perhaps one should look at how the calves are handled at home before sale day.

Lost gain is not only a function of sale day. Lost gain also is a function of total management of an operation. Minimizing shrink over the transition period is important, but the bottom line (cha-ching) is influenced all season long.

Unfortunately, most of these numbers do not exist in the average management portfolio of herd calf gain because producers generally assume calves are constantly gaining from birth. The current benchmark figure that guides those producers using the CHAPS program, through the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, is 2.38 pounds per day. Therefore, a typical goal for producers is to achieve at least 2.38 pounds per day gain throughout the grazing season.

In visiting with Lee Manske, NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center range specialist, typical calf gain in midsummer for calves grazing season-long and twice-over rotation systems is 2.47 pounds and 2.46 pounds, respectively. However, as we get closer to weaning, the season-long system calves are gaining 1.64 pounds per day versus 1.82 pounds on the twice-over system.

In both of these systems, the calf walks alongside the milk machine, commonly called the cow. The calf grazes the pasture. As fall approaches, the cow's milk flow decreases and the calf needs to make up the difference by eating more.

Provided the quantity and quality of forage is adequate, the calves continue to graze, gain (cha-ching, cha-ching) and put money in the bank. Producers have a choice. Producers can accept the declining value of nutrition as fall progresses into winter and lose money or take action and provide supplemental nutrition, such as creep feed, to the calves prior to weaning or change management to develop better grazing systems.

The value of change is real. The main purpose of calf growth is to convert typical ruminant feeds into meat and protein destined for sale within the beef industry and ultimately to the consumer's plate. The moral of the story is that it is easy to look out at the world and find reasons why dollars (cha-ching) aren't flowing into one's bank as quickly as one wants, but in reality it is easier to look inside for change.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center just shipped a load of steers that had an average pay weight of 667 pounds at \$118.50. Since real shrink is seldom known, but assuming body tissue weight loss of 3 percent, approximately 20 pounds were lost in transit or just more than \$23 per head. Since these calves came from season-long and twice-over rotational grazing systems, the predicted difference in fall weight gain using different management systems could exceed \$12. (60 days of weight gain (1.82 minus 1.64 pounds) times market price).

Adding creep to make up the lost weight gain (compared with midsummer gain) is another option. Granted, the numbers are only estimates, but remember the moral of the story. Management systems impact dollars (cha-ching) and are easier to change than processes that involve more people.

May you find all your NAIS-approved ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://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](http://www.CHAPS2000.com) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0275.

---

## **Predicted Calf Average Daily Gain**

	<b>Season-long Calf</b>	<b>Twice-over Calf</b>
Early July	2.47 lbs	2.46 lbs
Early October	1.64 lbs	1.82 lbs

Data extrapolated from Manske, L.L., M.E. Biondini, D.R. Kirby, J.L. Nelson, D.G. Landblom, and P.J. Sjursen. 1998. Cow and calf performance on season-long and twice-over rotation grazing treatments in western North Dakota. North Dakota Cow-Calf Conference. Bismarck, ND. p. 5-17.