Late-calving Cows Can Be Costly

By Kris Ringwall
Extension Beef Specialist
NDSU Extension Service

The heat of summer is here and the forage is drying up as usual. Hope is part of human nature, but hope is sometimes the only rain one gets.

The chat about what would be ideal gets producers nowhere, so producers need to be proactive by having a plan. Most long-range ranch operations do have or should have a contingency plan. The most popular and common sense plan is when there is grass, have a few extra stock around to graze it.

An extra pen of yearlings, a few more heifers than normal or a little lighter culling could result in extra cattle to harvest grass and add cash in the fall. Activating a contingency plan (moving to a drylot or selling them) should remove those cattle from the operation.

Pairs still are selling well. Calves and yearlings are bringing good money. At the local livestock barn in southwestern North Dakota, five-weight and six-weight calves or yearlings (sometimes it is hard to tell the difference) are selling from $109.50 to $117.75 per hundredweight.

Older cows with calves at the side brought from $1,085 to $1,475 a pair. Three-weight type calves were selling for $500 per head.

Reducing cattle numbers is like cleaning house. Each year an operation accumulates some odds and ends, but if feed is looking short, don't hesitate to sell. Early sales can free up acreage for younger, more productive cows. Waiting until everyone decides to sell is not the answer, either, so plan ahead.

The principle behind the second cut is reproduction. Reproduction pays the bills. As was noted a couple of weeks ago, a bull that doesn't settle cows costs money and so do cows that are not bred to calf early in the calving season.

Data assembled through the Cow Herd Appraisal Performance System (CHAPS) reveals that 62.4 percent of the cows living in the upper Great Plains calve within the first 21 days of the calving season. A total of 86.4 percent of the cows calve within the first 42 days of the calving season. The typical growth rate on these calves is 2.38 pounds per day on northern pastures, nursing medium- to large-frame cows.

There are certain management practices that can be discussed involving these numbers, but let's focus on the remaining 13.6 percent that did not calve until 42 days after the start of the calving season or the 6.6 percent that never calved at all. Both of these groups are target groups for early culling. (In BeefTalk 293, one needs to recall the calving distribution table is triggered by the date the third mature cow calves.)

The cow that never calved should not be on the pasture anyway, but just in case she is, pull her in and sell her. The late-calving cows, as defined by the calving distribution table as those that calved after 42 days into the calving season, are most likely to breed late in the next calving season. These cows also should be noted.

Every calf late-calving cows produce already has given up a maximum of 42 days of calf gain. With an average daily gain of 2.38 pounds a day, late-born calves, for all practical purposes, are 100 pounds lighter.

For late-calving cows to improve or breed earlier, they need more feed, but the shortage of feed is the very reason this article is being written. So, pull out the calving book, draw a line 42 days into the calving season. Ask yourself, if cows need to go, maybe, just maybe, should the late-calving cows be candidates for a pair sale?

May you find all your NAIS-approved 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 BT0307.

Drought Culling Strategy

	CHAPS Cows Calving
Within 21 days	62.4 %
Within 42 days	86.4 %
Late	13.6 %

Total potential calf weight loss on late calves

42 days X 2.38 pounds average daily gain = 100 pounds