It's Always Nice to Talk Cattle

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The call was from a producer who wanted to go over his CHAPS records. The CHAPS record program is a service of the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association and North Dakota State University Extension Service.

CHAPS stands for Cow Herd Appraisal of Performance Software and has been utilized by beef producers since the mid-1980s. The program is relatively simple, even though some producers would debate that any record program is far from simple.

The opportunity to assist a producer in reviewing his CHAPS records was enjoyable. The quality and depth of business sense in the cow-calf sector always is evident and a visit about cattle with producers is very uplifting.

Although a ream of paper quickly can be printed as one generates facts and figures within CHAPS, three pages pretty well tell the story. The herd summary page starts with a quick review of the number of cows exposed, kept for calving, aborted, open, calving, losing their calf and weaning calves.

If one knows the typical values for these traits, a quick assessment can be made on the general reproductive and health status of the herd. For typical CHAPS users, the pregnancy percentage has been 93.7; pregnancy loss, 0.73 percent; calving, 92.99 percent; calf death loss, 3.08 percent; and calf crop or weaning, 90.85 percent.

A quick glance of the herd statistics did not indicate any significant issues. Following these figures is the calving distribution table. There probably is no other piece of data or data summary that is more telling of the herd than this table.

The cattle are sorted by age and calving date. Then the table displays the number of calves that were born within each age of cow and 21-day calving period within the herd.

If one never has seen a calving table, it would be worth the time to produce one from your calving book. When a call comes in about what types of cows to cull, the information is very revealing.

The number of cows calving late, as well as those advancing in age within the herd, is noted. In addition, the average weaning weight for each age of cow and for each 21-day calving interval is noted.

With a quick glance, a herd can be evaluated and, depending on how deep one wants to cull, the decisions can be made on which cows need to be identified and marketed to cull. On the herd I was reviewing, a relatively low value was replacement rate.

Within CHAPS, the typical replacement rate is 14.7 percent. The producer who has been able to manage his or her cow herd productively and successfully has kept the replacement expenses at a minimum.

The average cow age is greater than in a typical herd, but the producer successfully was producing calves from cows that are paid for rather than expensive first-calf heifers. The financial portfolio always is very complex for any producer. One simply cannot indicate what particular point makes or breaks an operation.

As often is noted, that is what management is all about. However, one thought is evident. As young students come through campuses and learn, at least on the academic side of the beef business, the tendency is to jump fast, buy quickly and sign the loan paper.

Fortunately, there are producers who can lend some wisdom to the cattle business. It is a joy to have the opportunity to visit with these producers. In the end, a few of the older cows were identified to cull, but the overall replacement rate was kept low, managerial decisions were confirmed and another good year seems to be in the offing.

It's always nice to talk cattle.

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 BT0382.

Key Points to a Quick Herd Review

» Total cows exposed

» Total cows kept for calving

» Number of cows aborted

» Number of cows open

» Number of cows calving

» Number of cows losing a calf

» Number of cows weaning a calf