

## **BeefTalk 510: Is the Time Right for Breeding Systems?**

*The real answer to the management of genetics is the need to return to where it started, which is the breeding systems.*

Growth and more growth has been an industry norm for some time. Like the dairy industry, individual beef cow output has increased through the years.

Weaning weight has moved up and down through the years, which is more than likely due to environmental factors. However, the most recent data gathered by the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association's CHAPS program indicates a trend of increased 205-day calf weaning weight.

In 1996, the adjusted 205-day weaning weight was 575 pounds. Since then, the typical adjusted 205-day weaning weight has increased.

In 1997, the value was at 587 pounds. In 1998 and 1999, it was 592 pounds. In 2000, CHAPS calves had a 205-day adjusted weight of 595 pounds.

The first five years of the new century continued to see an increase in weight. The typical 205-day adjusted weight was 605 pounds in 2001, 613 pounds in 2002, 618 pounds in 2003, 627 pounds in 2004 and 634 pounds in 2005.

Even though these CHAPS herd numbers are raw numbers, a trend could be noted. In 2006, 2007 and 2008, the 205-day adjusted values were 636 pounds, 635 pounds and 639 pounds, respectively.

Interestingly, the actual weaning weight has not changed much during the same time period. The cattle have averaged 554 pounds actual weight at fall weighing.

What has happened is the calves are younger when weaned. In 1996, the average weaning age was 199 days. In 2008, the average weaning age was 189 days.

Essentially, 10 days of growth opportunity has been removed from the calves. In terms of pounds, if the typical calf has a weight-per-day gain of 3 pounds, then 30 pounds of calf weaning weight has not been captured.

In addition, the adjusted 205-day weight also accounts for the age of the cow and adjusts weaning weight to a mature cow at 5 years of age. Since cowherds always will have young cows in them, there always will be lost weight gain in younger cows.

However, the increasing adjusted 205-day weight is indicative of the body size of cattle in the industry today. Even more interesting is that producers continue to market large-growth cattle, sell them at similar weights and allow the feeding industry to capture the additional growth potential bred into the cattle.

Ironically, the heifer mates to these cattle are retained at the home place. Although slow, their mature weight naturally would be similar to the steers that were sent to the feedlot. They have gotten bigger.

The real answer to the management of genetics is the need to return to where it started, which is the breeding systems. In many respects, the discussion of cross-breeding systems is intended to allow producers to maintain an efficient maternal cow at home, purchase good terminal sires, produce a terminal offspring that was intended for the feed yard and then deliver lean-muscled cattle to the packers within the desired age requirements.

Through the years, many of our beef cattle are similarly bred and producers have taken the fine-tuned art of genetic selection to new levels. Lines of cattle within a breed can be thought of in the same light as different breeds of cattle. The same genetic principles apply.

“Obvious” may not be everyone's choice of words. If the trait one is selecting for, in this case growth, follows a pattern more descriptive of an arrow shot in the air, then eventually the replacement heifer question comes to bear. The answer really does not rest in debate, but rather in the implementation of breeding systems.

Such systems, based on the current data available, certainly should assist managers in making better decisions. The continuation of single-trait, unchecked selection has no limits. The consequences simply lead to more debate.

Cattle breeding systems, indexes and other tools may well be the better answer. May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>.

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

## Weaning Weights

### — CHAPS Producers —

Year	205 day Adjusted Weaning Weight (Pounds)
1996	575
1997	587
1998	592
1999	592
2000	595
2001	605
2002	613
2003	618
2004	627
2005	634
2006	636
2007	635
2008	639