

BeefTalk: Time to be Proactive

| Golden Nugget for the Beef Business | |
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| Total digestible nutrients (TDN) required for a typical 1,200-pound cow | |
| Daily Intake | |
| Born plus six months | 15.4 pounds of TDN |
| Last month of lactation and post weaning | 10.8 pounds of TDN |

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Golden Nugget for the Beef Business

Plan ahead because next year's calves are already growing inside their mothers.

If one is to remain in the beef business, planning is critical. Year after year, a little golden nugget often is missed in the cattle business. Thinking ahead and using some good old logic should tell a producer that the cow is going to start slowing up on her milk production as the fall season approaches. In many operations, the producer will stop milking the cow.

The obvious reason is weaning. While the calves are on the cows, one would estimate that a typical 1,200-pound cow with moderate milk production would need an estimated average of 15.4 pounds of TDN (total digestible nutrients). This is in stark contrast to the last month of lactation and post weaning when that same cow only needs an estimated average of 10.8 pounds of TDN. That is almost a 30 percent reduction in daily pounds of TDN or, as previously noted, a golden nugget.

The cows and calves are going their separate ways. Even if the calves stay on the cows, the cows are encouraging the calves to move along. The motherly bond is there, but nutritional support is waning. Of course, depending on the goals of the operation, the nutritional plan of the calf is adjusted.

Many calves are weaned and sold as bawling calves. However, many calves also are weaned and preconditioned. In some cases, the calves are targeted as calf feds. In others, the yearling or grass market is the goal. That being said, many producers dote on the calves and miss the golden nugget.

Qoheleth once summed up the living world as "a time to give birth, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to uproot the plant. A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to tear down, and a time to build."

In the cattle business, there is a time to renew and a time to dwindle. There is a time to build and a time to tear down. The positive point is that now is the time to prepare to put some weight back on those cows. Now is the time to position the cow to have enough grass, crop residue, corn stalks and hay. Simply put, the cow wants enough feed in front of her so she can do what she naturally wants to do, which is gain some weight back before the harshness of winter sets in and the demands of a growing fetus remind her of motherhood.

We all are very familiar when it is time for a cow to give birth, be milked, be a mother and reproduce. The cows are coming off a time of what they do best, which is to be milked and raise a calf. The process is demanding and can be brutal.

Some cows become thin or frail because they have given everything to raise a calf. Just like us, the family comes first and the cost second.

The gold nugget comes in the fall when the harvesting of forage becomes a buffet waiting to be consumed. On top of the available forage, at least for those who had rain, the cow has an engrained desire to maintain her body weight, grow, produce milk and reproduce.

During tough times, such as a drought, the first thing a cow will do is quit reproducing and then quit producing milk and growing. The cow also may fail to maintain adequate body weight. In the fall, the cow is more than likely already bred and has no need to produce milk. Therefore, when adequate food is present, she grows. She grows muscle and adds conditioning. She also is preparing for the upcoming late gestation calf growth, winter chill and resuming milk production in the spring. After that, the process starts over with breeding.

One could express that same yearly cycle based on daily pounds of TDN that a cow needs to consume. Shane Gadberry, University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture assistant professor in nutrition, did that by starting at the time of calving and calculating the daily TDN requirements for twelve months.

The first month of daily TDN requirement is 15.7 pounds. For the next 11 months, the daily TDN requirements are 16.7, 16.4, 15.4, 14.5, 13.7, 10.5, 10.8, 11.2, 11.9, 12.6 and 13.8 pounds, respectively. Using some good logic, a producer will look to see when the lowest TDN requirement is for the cow and take advantage of that time to add some weight back on the cow.

Again, plan ahead because next year's calves are already growing inside their mothers. It is the producer's job to help the cows meet their needs and then some. That time is soon, so start thinking.

May you find all your ear tags.