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BeefTalk: Beef Production Weaning 498 Pounds Per Cow Exposed

To truly measure progress, producers need to collect, analyze and report data, and set goals.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

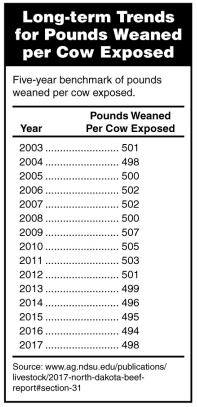
NDSU Extension Service

Friendly, conversational chitchat rules at cattle gatherings.

Conversation guides us, particularly when someone casually notes the ranch had just marketed a 91 percent calf crop with an average weight of 568 pounds for 192-day-old steer calves.

Silence prevailed until the neighbor asked, "Are you sure?" "Yep," the rancher replied, "but I was just average. Maybe someday I can manage my way to the upper third."

Images



Long-term Trends for Pounds Weaned per Cow Exposed

Five-year benchmark of pounds weaned per cow exposed.

Year	Pounds Weaned Per Cow Exposed
2003	501
2004	498
2005	500
2006	502
2007	502
2008	500
2009	507
2010	505
2011	503
2012	501
2013	499
2014	496
2015	495
2016	494
2017	498

Source: www.ag.ndsu.edu/publications/livestock/2017-north-dakota-beef-report#section-31

Long-term Trends for Pounds Weaned per Cow Exposed

Another rancher offered that the culling process this year was "deeper than usual and we hope the hay supply will hold over the core cow herd." The hope is for a mild winter and a return to a normal growing season to raise some more of those 550-plus-pound steer calves.

The dialogue continues, which is a good thing, but the comments are generally not data driven, which is critical in assessing the status of the cow enterprise. The best way to make cow-culling decisions is to access and utilize production benchmarks.

The North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association recently updated the CHAPS (Cow Herd Appraisal of Performance Software) benchmarks, a running five-year average of herds in the CHAPS program for a minimum of three years. CHAPS is an inventory-based program and does not allow for the omission of cow records because the program is based on a total-herd inventory. Reproductive and performance data are collected and

columns

BeefTalk: BeefTalk: Beef Production Weaning 498 Pounds Per Cow Exposed (2017-11-09) To truly measure progress, producers need to collect, analyze and report data, and set goals. FULL STORY

Prairie Fare: Prairie Fare: Are You Among the 1 in 3? (2017-11-09) An estimated 84 million Americans have prediabetes, and most don't know it. FULL STORY

processed within CHAPS and provide a good indication of today's upper Great Plains beef cattle production.

Simple data is best, so if a producer wants a quick evaluation of where the herd is, pounds weaned per cow exposed is a good way to get an overall feel for the herd data because the value combines reproductive and performance data.

So let's look at the benchmark. Although annual trends are evident in the database, the bottom-line benchmark number - pounds of calf weaned per cow exposed - is 498 pounds. Simply rounding the number up to 500 pounds would be nice, but I will leave that to the chitchatting.

The benchmark for pounds of calf weaned per cow exposed has been quite consistent. Historically (10-plus years ago), the benchmark was 501 pounds for 2003, 498 pounds for 2004, 500 pounds for 2005, and 502 pounds for 2006 and 2007.

Has the industry changed much? Not really. In 2008, the benchmark for pounds weaned per cow exposed was again at 500 pounds, and it was 507 pounds in 2009, 505 pounds in 2010, 503 pounds in 2011 and 501 pounds in 2012.

Interestingly, the average producer has not been able to sustain the 500-pound threshold in recent years. In 2013, the benchmark dropped below 500 pounds to 499 pounds. The chitchat did not pick up that difference and the thought was still at 500 pounds. But in 2014, pounds weaned per cow exposed dropped to 496, and it dropped again in 2015 to 495 pounds and again in 2016 to 494 pounds. This was a somewhat challenging trend, although 2017 did see an increase back up to 498 pounds weaned per cow exposed.

In the 1990s, pounds weaned per cow exposed was even lower, suggesting the beef industry is fairly dynamic in annual production characteristics. But, in the big picture, production traits are relatively consistent. Pounds weaned per cow exposed, as well as other production traits, are very informative and can be utilized to "benchmark" current herd production within an individual producer's herd.

As has been noted, for every cow exposed, CHAPS producers are weaning 498 pounds of calf per cow exposed. The number itself is not as critical as is the ability for producers to gauge their own level of production.

Goals are set and measured against the CHAPS benchmarks. Attaining greater production or even just holding even may be the goal. Knowledge allows for the setting of goals, and the process of reaching a goal occurs through evaluation, modification and implementation of appropriate management or genetics.

However, financial and economic evaluations are needed to complement production traits to truly assess a cattle operation. No absolute answers are available on what a particular ranch should produce. The academic answer is optimization.

In reality, the need is to grow profitable cattle a producer can appreciate and that still meet industry needs. Cattle need to convert resources into cash that sustains an operation. Each producer gets to set goals, and the road map to meeting the goals should be based on data that give one knowledge to stay in business.

One thing is for sure: Those "naysayers" who claim you can't wean 500 pounds per cow exposed to the bull need to look again. Their neighbor may well be filling more trucks with pounds of calf. Chitchatting is good, but remember, to truly measure progress, producers need to collect, analyze and report data, set goals and repeat.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact your local NDSU Extension Service agent (https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/directory) or Ringwall at the Dickinson Research Extension Center, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601; 701-456-1103; or kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu.

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Attachments

PDF - Long-term Trends for Pounds Weaned per Cow Exposed

(NDSU_Extension_Service_BeefTalk_110917.pdf - 18.79 Kb)

EPS - Long-term Trends for Pounds Weaned per Cow Exposed

(NDSU_Extension_Service_BeefTalk_110917.eps - 226.44 Kb)