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BeefTalk: Reproductive Performance in Commercial Beef Herds is Remarkable

As a whole, today's cattle reproduce very well.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

Data from the Cow Herd Appraisal Performance Software (CHAPS), through the North Dakota State University Extension Service and North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA), illustrate that beef cattle reproduction is quite successful.

Producers may experience occasional issues, but as a whole, today's cattle reproduce very well, which is indicated by the CHAPS data collection and analysis. Reproduction is measured by looking at the absolute values of a cow attaining a successful pregnancy and subsequent outcome, as well as the distribution of when a cow calves.

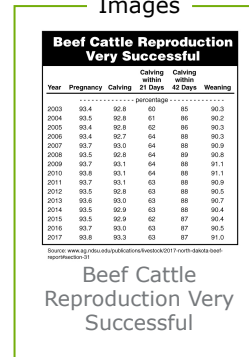
Current reproductive benchmarks are 93.8 for pregnancy percentage, 93.3 for calving percentage and 91 for weaning percentage. The calving distribution benchmark for cows and heifers shows 63 percent calved within the first 21 days, 87 percent calved within 42 days and 96 percent calved by 63 days.

Cattle producers, as a whole, should be pleased with their reproductive rates. In fact, given the nature of reproduction, opportunities to improve for many producers are limited. That being said, the very purpose of benchmarking is to allow individual producers to assess their own operation and judge for themselves as to their success. If the operation is below the benchmark, then the opportunity for more input is there.

The NDBCIA uses the CHAPS program to calculate five-year rolling benchmark values for average herd reproductive performance. A closer look at the average actual pregnancy percentage benchmark shows not much has changed. Historically (10-plus years ago), the



Images



columns

BeefTalk: BeefTalk: Reproductive Performance in Commercial Beef Herds is Remarkable (2017-11-22) As a whole, today's cattle reproduce very well. [FULL STORY](#)

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benchmark percentage was 93.4 for 2003, 93.5 for 2004, 93.4 for 2005, 93.4 for 2006 and 93.7 for 2007.

In 2008, the benchmark percentage was 93.5, and it was 93.7 in 2009, 93.8 in 2010, 93.7 in 2011 and 93.5 in 2012. More recently, the benchmark percentage was 93.6 in 2013, 93.5 in 2014, 93.5 in 2015 and 93.7 in 2016. The 2017 benchmark for pregnancy percentage is 93.8.

The calving percentage benchmark was 92.8 for 2003, 2004 and 2005, 92.7 for 2006 and 93 for 2007. In 2008, the benchmark percentage was 92.8, and it was 93.1 in 2009, 2010 and 2011, and 92.8 in 2012. More recently, the benchmark percentage was 93 in 2013, and 92.9 in 2014 and 2015, with 93 in 2016. The 2017 benchmark for calving percentage is 93.3.

A successful reproductive year is completed by weaning a calf. The benchmark for weaning percentage was 90.3 for 2003, 90.2 for 2004, and 90.3 for 2005 and 2006, with 90.9 for 2007. In 2008, the benchmark percentage was 90.8, and it was 91.1 in 2009 and 2010, 90.9 in 2011 and 90.5 in 2012. More recently, the benchmark percentage was 90.7 in 2013, and 90.4 in 2014 and 2015, with 90.5 in 2016. The 2017 weaning percentage benchmark is 91.

As noted, the ability for an individual cow to maintain excellent reproductive performance and raise a calf has been constant.

Another way to evaluate herd reproductive performance is to review the calving distribution within the herd. The annual distribution of calving dates within a calving season is equally impressive during the past year for those herds involved with CHAPS.

In a historical view (10-plus years ago), the benchmark calving distribution for the percentage of cows calving within 21 days and 42 days was 60 and 85 for 2003, 61 and 86 for 2004, 62 and 86 for 2005, and 64 and 88 for 2006 and 2007.

In 2008, the calving distribution benchmark percentage was 64 and 89, followed by 64 and 88 in 2009 and 2010, with 63 and 88 in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. More recently, the benchmark was 62 and 87 in 2015 and 63 and 87 in 2016. The 2017 benchmark is 63 percent calving in the first 21 days and 87 percent calving within the first 42 days. Wow!

Despite good years and not-so-good years, the cow herd continues to reproduce. What does one say? Variables will change the reproductive rate in the small sense, but cows appear to have a very strong urge to reproduce.

The management practices will vary, as will the needed nutritional and health inputs among herds, but the bottom line is cattle reproduction is stable. The tools that modern-day cattle producers have available to them are extensive, and the implementation of herd-appropriate management, along with input from health, nutrition, reproduction and genetic professionals, has allowed for the evolution of a very efficient beef cow-calf industry.

The offspring of these herds are sold annually and drive the cattle industry. But, as with any business, astute producers always are aware that driving the ship means a watchful eye.

Change will happen, whether desired or not, but the cow herd seems to weather those impacts well. The challenge for producers is to keep up with the herd records and be informed, with less worry and less stress.



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

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 [EPS - Beef Cattle Reproduction Very Successful](#)

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