



BeefTalk 605: Plan Ahead Instead of Reacting; Sell Infertile Cows

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Too Many Cows for Dry Pastures?

A Quick Suggestion to Reduce Inventory

Typical CHAPS benchmarks:

6.5% of the cowherd is typically open

4.7% of the cows typically calve very late

Find these cows and market them!

As with bulls, open cows simply eat well, compete better and produce fat.

Now is the time to be thinking just how many cow-calf pairs should be turned out to grass. Stocking rates and grazing dates should have been planned and set.

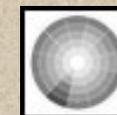
However, predictions of rainfall shortages need to be applied to the plan and stocking rates adjusted to accommodate less potential forage.

Another issue that producers need to remind themselves about is that nice, early warm weather does not mean extending the grazing period and letting cows and calves out early. The temptation certainly is there, but don't.



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Grass, like any other living thing, needs to be ready when the cattle are turned out to graze if one expects to maximize the potential harvest. Early grazing does not enhance grass productivity. At least in southwestern North Dakota, the first of May is a good, traditional date to turn out cattle on cool-season grass. The first of June is a good date for cattle to start on native summer grasses.

Every spot in the world has its own best turnout date, so always check with those around you to see if you are synchronized with the best time.

There is an obvious question. How does one get the best yield from pasture grass? The answer involves the development of a proper grazing system and then stocking the system correctly. The stocking rate adjustments are very difficult to make because, in most scenarios, it means lowering cow numbers.

Cows are products of years of selection and careful evaluation, so parting with cows means parting with a piece of one's self, which is not easy to do. However, there are some things to think about to make the process simpler.

Bulls incapable of settling cows are useless, so infertile bulls should be culled. Likewise, cows that fail to settle should be culled. The greatest value of an infertile cow is as salvage. As with bulls, open cows simply eat well, compete better and produce fat. They are not the product of a profitable and consumer-orientated beef system.

Bulls that don't settle cows cost money and so do cows that are not bred to calf early in the calving season. A case in point for this reasoning is that feed is predicted to be short this year. It is of no use to live in denial. There is no room in the pasture for infertile cattle.

Early detection of open or later-calving cows, regardless of the reason, can result in a potential group of cattle to cull. CHAPS benchmarks indicate that 6.5 percent of the cowherd typically is open and 4.7 percent of the cows usually calve very late. Very late is defined as after the first 63 days or, for practical purposes, two months after the start of the calving season. Combined, these two groups of cows account for more than 11 percent of the cowherd and would make a very logical cut as the pastures and feed start to look scarce.

All one needs to sort late-calving cows is a good calving book or, for some, an extra pasture. Call the veterinarian and get that ultrasound date booked for early pregnancy detection.

If the feed situation starts to look more dismal, typically more than 11 percent of the cows calve after the 42nd day of the calving season but before the 64th day. Although more difficult to decide, this group of cows also could make a trip to town, with the final destination the calving pasture of someone who prefers later-calving cows.

Another good set of cattle to evaluate early is the yearling heifers. Plan on an early ultrasound because only 72 percent of yearling heifers have calves within 21 days of the start of the calving season and 86 percent within 42 days of the start of the calving season.

There seems to be some regret in repeating notes, but infertility simply needs to be steered out of the beef cattle system, and during a drought is a good time to make the point. Although producers still do not know the fate of this year's grazing season, turning cattle out to pastures with only hope in one's pocket makes the situation worse. The reason being is that every cow eats and no cow plans ahead for tomorrow. They all eat and do not ration themselves.

If a dry season progresses, more mouths early means fewer mouths later. Why not plan instead of react? Hope this helps and gives you some space for thought and room for cows to eat during dry times, as well as in good times.

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.

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