



## BeefTalk 705: What Aren't We Doing?

### SUPPORTING MATERIALS

#### The Cold Weather Challenge

— Calve Early —

Freeze and sell 720-pound calves in November

— Calve Late —

Stay warm and sell 720-pound calves in February

*There was no winter calving preparation, so there was no extra bedding, sorting of cows, precalving vaccinations, clearing the aisles of snow, extra heat in the warming room, and line of work boots and insulated coveralls.*

The ability to sell 720-pound May- and June-born steer calves in mid-February begs the question: What aren't we doing?

This past weekend, arctic cold air highlighted the question in bold print. "We aren't calving in this horrible cold" was the answer for the Dickinson Research Extension Center. There

was no winter calving preparation, so there was no extra bedding, sorting of cows, precalving vaccinations, clearing the aisles of snow, extra heat in the warming room, and line of work boots and insulated coveralls.

The cows were chewing their cud quietly on the downside of the windbreak and passing the time of day. The feed tractor and shredder were in use for the days feeding, but that was about it. We still are waiting for some water to thaw, but that will be a while.

This will be the third winter without calving, so the crew is getting accustomed to it. That look, which is the need to help a cold calf, is gone, and so is the need to get the heater started to keep things warm or the need to slip into those thawed coveralls that are slightly moist but will refreeze. Gone is the need to pull gloves off to help a cow that is calving. Also gone is the need to restart the cold pickup and the need to sit perfectly still in that cold pickup until some form of heat arrives. That total let-down feeling when you ask someone else to go check the cows and they refuse is gone.

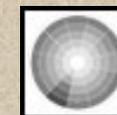
This winter will go down as one of the colder ones. It is simply too bloody cold. Does life have to be that difficult? That is a personal choice. In theory, the rewards must outweigh the challenges, but no matter what, the center is no longer winter calving.

As has been the case the last two summers, the bulls were turned out on Aug. 1 for May 10 calving. The cows have bred well because there was a better than normal first 21-day conception rate. There were a few more or a few less open cows, depending on which group of cows one looks at.

The change obviously has been good for the center because the work environment is more relaxed, the cows are



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wintering well and winter inputs are down. On the human side, the ranch discussion focuses on the occasional problems. However, when work, time off and sleep are balanced, people make better decisions. Those improved decisions make for fewer complications and better outcomes, so there is a better work environment.

That all sounds good, but what happened to those lost days of calf growth? Essentially, moving bull turnout from June 1 to Aug. 1 is 61 days of lost calf growth if a producer still weans at the traditional time. For the center, the calves are off the cows by mid-November. Using typical growth rates of 2.5 pounds per day of age, that is a loss of more than 150 pounds of calf.

Last fall, the center's steer calves from the larger-framed cows averaged 572 pounds at weaning in mid-November and were 720 pounds by mid-February. The steers were not pushed and were maintained under pasture and field conditions. They grazed standing corn, along with free-choice grass hay in bale feeders, and were given 2 pounds of protein supplement daily.

Obviously, these calves could have been pushed harder for a quicker gain, but the bottom line, even with relatively simple facilities, was that the May- and June-born calves did make up the lost weight due to age with relative ease. The calves did well, which allows the center to re-ask: Is May-through-June calving reasonable? The answer continues to be positive.

Granted, the calves need to be backgrounded, so the choice is personal. If a producer enjoys winter or early spring calving and would rather be calving than feeding older calves during the cold months, the answer is winter calving.

This particular cow-calf model has been the heart of beef production on the northern Plains for decades. However, if one debates keeping the cows as the joy of calving in the cold lessens or simply becomes impractical for physical reasons, there are other options.

Hired labor is hard to find, but sometimes it works out. For the center, holding the bulls in until Aug. 1, with a May 10 calving date, became the answer. The cows and calves are doing great and so is the crew.

Calves have a tremendous flexibility to gain weight, so selecting the right calving season to match the producer's environment and needs certainly is doable. With the ever-increasing shortage of cows, think twice before selling. Find the management plan that fits and then add some fun.

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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