



# Beef Talk

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## Cows bred back to conceive early in season

The fall cow shuffle is close to being over. Cold weather, frozen water and the absence of feed tells one it is time for a change.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center switched production systems last year when the bulls were moved from an early June to an early August turnout. In other words, no more March-April calving. Now, it is May-June calving.

The transition has been challenging, but there seems to be light at the end of the tunnel. The early uneasiness of cows breeding in late summer seems to be set aside. Having finished ultrasounding the cows, they bred well.

Even as the cattle went through the chutes, the feeling was good. Interestingly, the cows seemed to be bred steadily until about midway through the second cycle and then tailed off quickly. One could say the cows were almost all bred by a cycle and a half. That essentially may be two cycles once calving is complete. The point is that the cows bred well despite the later bull turnout, late summer heat and dry pastures.

In fact, based on the ultrasounds, the projected first 21-day calving percentages look very good. Sixty-seven percent of the mature cows are projected to calve within the first 21 days of the calving season starting May 10. That way, two-thirds of the cows should be calved out on crested wheat. Twenty-four percent are projected to calve within the first three weeks of June.

What is very interesting, because the center would like to have all the calves worked by June 15, is that an additional 21 cows could be culled that are projected to calve after June 15. This would mean the center would have an estimated 45-day calving season.

Based on reproduction, this would leave the center with 219 mature cows to calve next spring. Unfortunately, not all the cows still are sound. As the end-of-the-year evaluation takes place, the number easily could be cut to 200. The replacement heifers have not been ultrasounded, but the anticipation of having 40 replacements bred on time is very realistic. This would leave the

center with 240 cows to calve next spring.

In reviewing the spring of 2012, the center held more than 235 cows. Although the center has the capacity to graze a few more cows, with the pending forecasts of continued dry weather, there is no rush to increase cow numbers. In fact, if the weather continues to remain dry, the center may have to reduce numbers further. However, that thought needs to wait for the mid- to late-winter weather projections.

Regardless, the center's May-June calving season was successful this past year. Of the 235 cows that were overwintered, seven did not calve. The other 228 cows weaned 218 calves.

An easier calving environment was not a question or concern when the center switched calving seasons. Rather, it was the ability of the cows to breed, particularly once the summer nutritional status began to decline and the temperatures began to climb.

### Performance

Fortunately, based on the Cow Herd Appraisal Performance Software (CHAPS) benchmarks provided by the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA), the center continues to meet and exceed the typical values for the percentage of calves born the first 21 days, as well as the second 21 days. In reviewing the benchmarks, the percentage of mature cows that calved within 21 days was 63.4%. The center is projecting a calving

within the first 21 days next year at 66.8%.

The percentage of mature cows that calved within 42 days was 88.8%, and the center is projecting next year to be at 90.6%. Although the calendar still is being worked on to reschedule the various management activities that revolve around calving periods, the center is adjusting to a May-June calving season.

One thing that certainly is missed is those big calves coming across the scale at weaning. However, after a pinch and a little reality check, the calves are 60 days younger and that means at least 150 pounds (lb.) of gain have yet to be put on. That will come because the calves are settling in the yards and preparing to go to standing corn. They look healthy and spry and certainly ready to take on winter.

The vaccinations have been given and a booster will be forthcoming. Although a pleasant problem, few of these calves ever will end up back on the ranch because increasing market pressure will pull even those great replacement-quality heifers to market.

A payday will come next spring. However, for now, it is pleasing to see the calves resting, eating and drinking. There are no health issues, just a few bawling calves and the echoing of the cows' response. That will pass as the cows settle down and are content to regain some weight and look forward to next spring's green pastures.

May you find all your ear tags.

