

Beef Talk: Does late calving mean late weaning?

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Does late calving mean late weaning? The Dickinson Research Extension Center changed calving dates, so the bull turnout date this year will be Aug. 1.

A slight adjustment backward by one week was made to better position the birth of the calves between May 1 and May 31. However, that brought up the question: Does late calving mean late weaning? If one listens carefully, many presenters will hedge. "That depends," is the most common answer.

Management change No. 1

In reality, cow-calf operations require a certain level of gross income to survive. Very often, the bottom line is discussed, but, for most operations, gross dollars drive the business. If enough money is put into the operation, the expenses seem to get paid and the family seems happy.

That probably is very poor economics. Most would agree that better money tracking always is warranted, but it does take gross income to have net income.

The challenge in late calving is pretty obvious. Calving two months later means 60 days of missed growth if one assumes a producer weans and sells on traditional dates. Those 60 days at a typical average daily gain of 2.5 pounds (lb.) would be equivalent to 150 lb.

Although market reports can be found in many publications, for discussion purposes, let's say that those calves could sell for \$1.50 to \$1.75 per lb. in mid-November. The gross dollars will be shorted by \$225 to \$262 if assuming that these are typical calves that are bawling at a typical auction barn. These later-born calves certainly are going to be bawling loud and certainly will have a greater incidence of health issues if sold right off the cow.

Management change No. 2

Management change No. 2 following the changing of the bull turnout date becomes pretty obvious. To maintain some semblance of normalcy while sitting in the auction ring, it would appear that later-born calves may need to be weaned later and certainly need to be kept at home to be grown. Home and grown could mean that the calf is on the cow or off the cow. It is the producer's choice.

The best answer at this point again appears to be "that depends." Before another major managerial change is made, please note that it is perhaps an unfair assumption that the typical beef producer cannot lower production costs greater than the \$225- to \$262-per-cow hit the producer takes in calf value.

Regardless of the total cost reduction within the herd, that is a lot of money on

a per-cow basis. With costs going up, it maybe still is a worthy challenge. Ultimately, it will be up to the individual producer.

Options

At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, a less challenging approach seems more palatable. The center will delay weaning the calves and also keep the calves on winter forage. The delayed calving also means how the calves are worked needs to be modified. As calves are moved to summer pasture, calf branding and vaccination for clostridial diseases will be delayed. The delay is triggered by the desire to work the cows and calves efficiently while making sure all the calves are present.

It would appear at this writing that the cow-calf pairs will be gathered during pasture rotations from mid-July to mid-August, which allows us access to the calves. The next logical calf work days will be in mid-November, when the cow-calf pairs are moved off pasture. This still could be problematic because an early winter may freeze water supplies, so we need some flexibility and caution.

What one does not want to do is trigger the ranch and crew into a crisis mode due to weather issues in the fall. Traditional preweaning gatherings are not being scheduled. Instead, the calves will be worked as cattle are removed

from scheduled summer pastures.

Once the calves are vaccinated and settled in, the big challenge will be to develop managerial plans that will keep these calves gaining weight at 2 lb. per day through their stay at the ranch.

The question returns as to what to feed the calves. If the goal simply is to maintain summer gains of 2.5 lb. per day, then many grain-based rations easily will put 2 to 3 lb. per day on the calves so that by mid-January, they will be ready to go to market as fine backgrounded calves.

For many producers that have moved their calving date to May, the obvious adjustment at the other end is to wean at 5 to 6 months of age and background the calf long enough to make up the difference in lost gross dollars because of lighter calf weights. However, feeding equipment and facilities will need to be addressed. For many cow-calf producers, this will be a challenge.

However, gone are the days of fall gatherings and shipping.

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.

