



Beef Talk

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New CHAPS benchmark

The North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA) has been keeping records since 1963 and annually presents five-year rolling benchmark values for average herd performance on several traits. It monitors this data using the Cow Herd Appraisal Performance Software (CHAPS) program. The purpose of the NDBCIA is the improvement of beef cattle, primarily focusing on genetic improvement, but also being very cognizant of the yearly management that is involved in a beef cattle operation.

By comparing individual herd values with the overall averages, individual herd performance can be evaluated. The data from the evaluation may lead to discussion, which may be the basis for management changes.

Data trends also can be evaluated. For example, cattle have gotten larger, smaller, larger again, and perhaps have somewhat leveled off in body size. This would be a typical data trend, a trend in the overall growth rate of cattle involved with the NDBCIA program.

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per cow exposed to the bull,
look again.**

A notable benchmark for producers this year is weaning 500 pounds (lb.) of calf per cow exposed to a bull, and it points to increased growth. Growth, generally thought of as average daily gain (ADG) in the feedlot business, is a major component of profit. In terms of the cow-calf producer, growth has the same effect: total pounds times price contributes in a major way to gross income.

Growth for cow-calf producers is different from feedlot growth. In the feedlot, an individual calf is responsible for only bearing its share of the overhead and variable expenses, since each calf gains weight according to its genetic potential. In the cow

business, that is not true.

Cows make producers money by producing calves that have more value than expense. The value of the calf principally is determined by weight, but, in contrast to the feedlot calf, the cow also must carry the burden of expense for cows that do not produce a calf.

An open cow has a market value, but that value will not cover the cost of replacing the cow. Each cow in the herd has to produce a calf to cover her annual expenses and those of nonproducing cows. As the NDBCIA evaluates traits to measure cow performance, the trait "pounds weaned per cow exposed to the bull" is a trait that factors in both management and genetics.

Appraising performance

This is just an example of the many traits NDBCIA monitors using CHAPS. Additional traits follow, along with the current benchmark.

The average CHAPS producer exposed 191 cows to bulls. The cows had an average age of 5.6 years. Of the 191 cows exposed to bulls, 93.4% were pregnant in the fall, 92.8% calved in the spring, and 90.3% weaned a calf in the fall. During the calving season, 62.4% calved during the first 21 days, 86.4% during the first 42 days and 94.6% within the first 63 days of the calving season.

Here are the actual average weaning numbers: age was 192 days, weight was 558 lb., and frame score was 5.5. These growth numbers translated into a gain of 2.95 lb. per day of age and a 627-lb. adjusted 205-day weight. For every cow exposed, CHAPS producers weaned 500 lb. of calf.

Knowing these numbers allows for appropriate modification through management or genetics. There are no absolute answers to what a particular ranch should produce. The academic answer is optimization. In reality, the need is to grow profitable cattle that a producer can appreciate and still meet industry needs.

Each producer must answer the question, but the answer must be based on data that ultimately tells you if you are in the game. To all those naysayers who claim you can't wean 500 lb. per cow exposed to the bull, look again.

Table 1: CHAPS 2005 production benchmarks, five-year averages

No. cows exposed	191
Cow age, years	5.6
Pregnancy rate, %	93.4
Calving rate, %	92.8
Weaning rate, %	90.3
Calving in first 21 days, %	62.4
Calving in first 42 days, %	86.4
Calving in first 63 days, %	94.6
Calf weaning age, days	192
Calf weaning weight, lb.	558
Frame score	5.5
Calf weight per day of age at weaning, lb.	2.95
Pounds of calf weaned per cow exposed	500
Replacement rate, %	15.1
Culling rate, %	13.8



Your neighbor may be filling more trucks and trailers than you are.

For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601; or visit its Web site at www.chaps2000.com. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0260.



Editor's Note: Addressing the past, present and future state of the beef cattle business, "Beef Talk" is a weekly column distributed by the NDSU Agricultural Communication office. Ringwall is executive secretary of the NDBCIA, director of the Dickinson Research Extension Center and an NDSU Extension beef specialist. An archive of columns can be found at www.BeefTalk.com, and your comments are always welcome.