

# Assessing Cow Herd Productivity

Weaning time for the commercial cow-calf producer is a good time to evaluate the cow herd for productivity, to assess herd management practices and to make or reaffirm plans for an effective genetic improvement program.

Joe Minyard, Extension beef specialist at South Dakota State University, urges producers to look at the number of calves weaned compared to the number of cows and heifers exposed for breeding the previous year.

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This, he says, could provide insight or an effective reminder of the fertility level or reproductive performance of the herd.

He also suggests looking at how uneven the calves are in weight and apparent age. “A lot of late, light-

weight calves can indicate a reproductive or herd management problem.

“And if you see problems here, such as a short calf crop or a strung-out calf crop, don’t automatically assume it was a bull fertility problem. The problem might be bull fertility, cow fertility, herd health, nutrition, your herd management program, or a combination of all of these.”

When looking at reproductive performance of the herd, Minyard suggests determining which cows bred back during the past summer. Consider pregnancy testing the cow herd. “Under present financial conditions in the beef industry you can’t afford to maintain open cows in your herd,” he said.

Weaning time also is a good time to evaluate the quality and performance of the calves, Minyard said.

“Are they of the type and quality you want and also will they command top prices at the market place? Are calf weights what they should or could be for your environmental conditions?”

If the cattle are not of the quality desired or are not as heavy as they should be, then one needs to look at two things. 1, Genetics quality and performance of bulls used, and 2, Growth potential and milk production of the cows. **AJ**

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