



Beef Cow Herd Performance Testing



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1. What is performance testing?

Performance testing is a simple method for obtaining systematic records for selecting and breeding highly productive beef cattle. The records can be used to put beef production on a business basis with a minimum of effort.

2. Who can use performance testing?

Both commercial and purebred producers who wish to improve their herds.

3. Why do performance testing?

Performance testing will help the cattleman improve the grade and increase weight of his calves more rapidly.

4. What must be done to test a cow herd?

To test a cow herd a cattleman should (1) contact his county agent for information and forms; (2) identify each cow and each calf; (3) record birth dates of calves, and (4) weigh and grade the calves at weaning time.

5. What is the best way to identify cows and calves?

Cows: Number branding each cow on the hip with a hot iron or freeze brand. Other successful methods combine the ear tattoo with neck chains, horn brands, or ear tags.

Calves: It is best to tattoo each calf and also to use some type of tag so you can identify calves easily in the pasture without catching them.

6. How much time does it take to test a herd?

Usually, to weigh and grade 100 calves takes about one-half day or about 2 minutes per calf. This will vary with the amount of help and handling equipment available.

7. What is the charge for this service?

If you tabulate the data yourself, there is no charge. In some counties an association makes a weighing charge to help pay for portable scales. There is a nominal charge

for having the data processed on IBM through the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association.

8. How can I get scales to weigh my calves?

Some county improvement associations have bought portable scales to be used in this program. See your county agent.

9. If I go on performance test, are there certain production or management practices that must be carried out?

There are no production or management requirements. Since each farm is different, this program is flexible. It provides information for your use on your own farm. It is not intended to compare records on different farms.

10. My cows don't look very good. Should I wait to put my herd on performance test until I cull them?

Don't wait! Put your herd on test and use records to help cull poor producing cows. Don't cull cows on looks alone, often "hard looking" cows produce the best calves.

11. How can I use these performance testing records?

Performance testing records can be used to:

1. Check on per cent calf crop
2. Cull poor producing cows
3. Select the best heifers for replacements
4. Measure the productivity of each bull
5. Increase weaning weights of calves produced
6. Improve the grade of calves produced
7. Check on herd management
8. Supplement bull testing information
9. Provide additional information for buyers

12. How long must I wait to get results?

After being on test one year, a farmer can cull the cows which are producing light, low grade, unprofitable calves. Also, cows failing to calve should be sold. Bulls that fail

to produce heavy weaning, high grade calves should be replaced.

13. What is the replacement heifer selection program?

Heifer calves are weighed, identified and graded at weaning (6 to 8 months), then they are weighed and graded again at 12 to 18 months of age. Poor gaining, low grade heifers can be culled. By saving good gaining heifers, herd improvement can be more rapid.

14. How will the cow herd performance test program supplement a bull testing program?

If you have your cow herd on test, you have a great deal of information to help you select the best bull calves for further testing.

15. If I increase weaning weights, will my quality go down?

No. Improvement in quality and increased weight can go hand in hand.

16. How fast can weaning weight and grade be increased?

Improvement depends on how much culling and selection you do. In one state the average weaning weight increased 100 pounds and average grade from good to choice in herds on performance test for 10 years.

17. How much does weaning weight vary in most herds?

In nearly every herd on test the top one-third of the calves outweigh the bottom one-third by 100 pounds or more. In some herds the top two-thirds of the cows make all the profit.

18. Does the bull have much to do with weaning weights?

One bull may increase weaning weights as much as 60 pounds. Each year such a bull earns about \$400 more than an average bull. Your bulls are half your herd, so try to get good ones!

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19. Can these records be used to compare two herds?

No. Accurate comparison cannot be made between farms since environmental conditions vary so much. Records are valuable to recognize weight and quality differences within a herd.

20. Where do some producers fail in their performance testing program?

For best results use these records when you cull your calves, cows and bulls! Many producers fail to make maximum use of the performance information collected.



Acknowledgement

Information in this circular on beef cow herd performance testing has been adapted for North Dakota use from a similar publication of the Arkansas Extension Service. The necessary revisions were made by animal husbandmen of the Cooperative Extension Service, North Dakota State University.

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