

Birth Weight Comments

Birth weight is one of the most discussed performance items to potential bull customers. Due to that, I am going to go into detail about my opinions on that subject. First of all, here at CK we actually weigh all of our calves and turn in actual birth weights. I repeat, we actually weigh them. This is the most difficult weight to get and the most important weight to get right. To get this weight, you must collect it within 24 hours of birth, catch the calf while avoiding a protective mother and be able to physically pick up and weigh the calf. We use scales that are accurate to the pound, so there is no guessing.

Birth Weight is also very relative to time of the year. Birth weight is affected by temperature with calves born in hot weather tending to be born light and colder weather calves being heavier. This is probably due to length of gestation and more blood flow to fetus in cold weather. The calves born here in late September and October are always lighter than the calves born in November and December. The January, February and March calves will trend heavier. Take these considerations in mind as you make your bull selections.

In the past 5 years, we have collected birth weights and weaning weights on the calves of 2033 cows and 496 heifers. First, let's discuss what we have learned from the data we have gotten from the cows. We check our calving cows at least twice a day. If we see a cow calving, we give her an hour and then get her up and assist. Doing this we have only pulled 10 normally presented calves from 2033 cows. Of those 10 normal presentation pulls, a mechanical calf puller was only used once in our cows in 5 years. The others were pulled by hand. From this, I would say that we do not have significant calving problems.

To put this data into practical terms, we divided our 5 year calf crop in half by birth weight. In the heavy birth weight group, we did assist 8 calves as compared to 2 in the light group, but the difference in weaning weight was staggering. **We weaned 35,152 more pounds of calves in the heavier birth wt group. At today's calf prices that is over \$70,000.** Although it wouldn't happen, you could lose every cow that we had helped and come out ahead. Why would you want low birth weight bulls to use on your mature cows? If you are concerned about calving in your older cows, just stay away the extreme heavy end, which we tend to cull anyway.

Now let's look at the data from the 496 heifers we calved in the past 5 years. The added weaning weight from the heavier birth wt calves was similar to the cows, with a 100 lbs per head weaning advantage for the heavy birth weight group compared to the light birth weight group, but as the birth weights increased there was significantly more calves pulled. Splitting the group as we did the cows, in the light birth weight group we pulled 5 calves as compared to 22 calves in the heavy birth weight group and 7 of those were difficult pulls compared to none in the lighter group. Although the heavy birth weight group weaned 8600 more lbs of calves, the added calving difficulties probably negates that advantage. So this tells me, not surprisingly, that Birth Weight is important in heifers, so use the Actual Birth Weight, Calving Ease and Birth Weight EPD's of the bulls to make your selection.