

Beef Business “Bull”etin

MIDWEST BEEF CATTLE CONSULTANTS, LLC

PRODUCING CATTLE THAT WORK FOR YOU



Four Questions

I received the book “Forty Chances” by farmer Howard Buffet for Christmas. Buffet explains that he was at a seed corn meeting and the speaker told the farmers that they have 40 chances to make a crop assuming they start farming at 25 and retire at 65. Some might get more chances and others less.

It is the same with your beef business. You get 40 chances to make a calf crop which made me think that we are all trying to answer 4 questions with our beef businesses.

Are we making a profit?

We frequently hear the word ‘sustainable’ when the topic turns to agriculture. If we are profitable, we can continue our business. If not, the business disappears, becomes a hobby, or is subsidized by other sources.

Profit is revenue minus expenses and the first place to look to improve profit in a beef business is to reduce the cost of production. Feed costs are high and we do not want to waste these valuable resources. Producers that limit feed hay to their cows save thousands of dollars vs. those that allow 24/7 access to hay. (See previous newsletters for details or call Mark or Chris). Feeding Rumensin to your beef cows during winter will save 10% of your hay. The ROI is 800-1000%!

Are we having fun?

Much of the nation felt the frigid air of the “bomb cyclone” just before Christmas that produced the coldest weather for many years. If you calve during the winter and especially during the blizzard, you were not having fun.

I recently talked to a beef producer that calves in January

“I’ve never had any calves in the past this docile and grow like these. We have calves weighing 650# at weaning.”

Derek Rump, Dillsboro, IN



Purebred Gelbvieh cow with 50% Balancer bull 52K that sells March 11. Top 35% EPDs in 22/23 traits and indexes. May be the best bull we’ve ever raised!

because they want to be done calving before corn planting season.

I relayed the story that Jeff Ryan from Cresco, Iowa told me many years ago. Jeff, his brother, and father have about 100 cows, a feedlot, and an extensive crop business. Jeff was scheduled for a surgery that would require a lengthy recovery and the surgery was scheduled for late March, right in the middle of calving season. Jeff calved out all the cows before this and never complained about “winter calving”, but after a few weeks of his dad and employee having to calve out all the cows Jeff decided “This is too much work for one guy.” Calving was switched to May 15 the following year. The difference was amazing and calving was fun and easy.

Jeff used two MBCC bulls via AI in 2021 and I called him about May 30 to ask how the calving season was going. His response was “*I haven't noticed*”. What?? My confusion was short lived when he then said, “*I'm busy with planting. I really haven't looked closely at the cows.*”

At first, I was a bit disappointed that the response was not, “*Wow, these are the best calves we've ever had,*” and I think my 10 seconds of silence after Jeff's response clued him in to my surprise. He continued, “*If I'm nearby, I'll stop just long enough to write down the cow's ID and the calf birth date. They have all been born unassisted and as I go by, I see they jump up and nurse quickly. I'll tag any calf I can catch when I'm available, but the majority get a tag in June when they all walk through the chute for castration/vaccinations.*”

Besides having more fun, actual spring calving greatly reduced winter feed cost because cows did not need to be in BCS 6 until early April instead of early February. They had almost zero health issues in newborn calves since they were born on green grass. Death loss plummeted, cow pregnancy rate increased and to their surprise calves weighed nearly as much at weaning as when they winter calved. The high-quality hay that would have gone to the cows was sold to the local dairies instead.

We are just like you and we enjoy raising cattle. Having those cattle be low maintenance with superior docility while calving in synch with nature makes it even more fun.

Are our genetics improving our herd?

Your goals for the genetics of your herd are likely different from your neighbors. If you keep back replacement females you need to breed ~60% of your cows to a ‘maternal bull’. Important traits would include making low-maintenance, fertile, docile, moderate frame, and moderate milk females. Growth should be good but does not need to be extreme. Making sure the genetics you select have a history of good feet and udders along with excellent longevity are paramount.

If all your calves go to the feedlot, growth, marbling, and efficiency are extremely important. (And if you have a large herd with multiple bulls, you need both maternal and terminal bulls.)

Since about 70-80% of all calves born are destined for the feedlot, we think marbling should always be a focus.

It is impressive how many MBCC bull buyers sell freezer beef. These producers report that they continue to have robust demand for halves and quarters of beef and we think the ‘buy local’ mindset will continue to grow. Currently, if a consumer went to the grocery store to buy the same quantity of beef, she would get by buying a half a beef from someone selling freezer beef, she would pay ~\$500 **more** for the half a beef from the store vs. someone selling freezer beef at market price. We know many freezer beef sellers that are capturing that \$500/half AND the consumer is getting a product that has been aged for 14 days which enhances the flavor and increases tenderness. So, the consumer is getting an improved product at no extra cost.

Please call us ahead of the March 11, 2023, sale so we can learn your goals and help you make a list of bulls that will fit your goals.

Are we improving our land?

I mentioned sustainability earlier and there is no doubt that farmers and ranchers are the creators of this term. Every time I go to the NCBA convention, I make sure to attend the Environmental Stewardship Award presentation. If you want to be inspired about the future of beef production, just listen to these stories. As the video plays with the farm/ranch family walking out in their beautiful pastures with the cows in the background, EVERY nominee says a version of the exact same thing. "I am a temporary caregiver of this land and my goal is to leave it in better condition for my children and grandchildren than I received it."

Have you had a forage/grazing specialist walk with you across your pastures to give recommendations on how to grow more forage, extend that grazing season and improve soil health? Do you soil test your pastures every 3 years as most forage specialists recommend? Do you practice Management-intensive Grazing by rotating cows to new grass every 4-7 days?

A Kansas State study showed the best return on investment for a beef cow-calf herd was improving the forage. It was not increasing weaning weight or improving genetics.

There are forage experts throughout the US. If you need help finding someone, call us for assistance.

CattleFax Report

One year ago, the forecast was for excellent cattle prices in 2023 with prices possibly leveling off in 2024. The drought of 2022 was severe in some key cattle grazing areas. Cows went to market and heifers were sold as feeder calves. It looks like cow numbers will continue to shrink in 2023 which will keep prices very favorable in 2023, 2024 and possibly 2025. Input prices are also high so we need these higher prices to stay profitable.

If you need cows, buying cows sooner rather than later seems wise. If you have been thinking about upgrading your genetics with an MBCC bull, now is the time to act. An MBCC bull purchased in our March 11, 2023, sale will have feeder calves selling in the fall of 2024 and prices should be spectacular.

Saturday, March 11 Schedule

10am - View Sale Cattle and discuss purchase options with MBCC Team

12pm - Lunch

1pm - Sale Bulls sell first, then females

* * All times are Eastern time * *

Sale Location:

M5 Family Farms,

3824 S Binford Rd, Carthage, IN 46115

Breeding Soundness Examinations

The most cost-effective procedure your veterinarian can do for your beef business is to do a breeding soundness exam (semen check) on your bulls. Every year I hear about a group of cows where almost no – or zero - cows get pregnant. If your goal is for your cows to work for you, make sure the bulls you are turning out are going to work for you.

We suggest you do the BSEs before March 11 so if you do have bulls that fail, you can select from our very best bulls.

Producer Focus – Ron and Clint Manning, Macy, IN

Manning Cattle Company started with Ronnie renting some pasture shortly after he and Maxine were married. The operation changed and evolved over the years from bottle fed calves to feeding out dairy beef. When their son, Clint married and expressed interest in the cow-calf business, the next phase was kicked off. Now the focus is cow-calf with the option of retaining ownership or selling feeders depending on what is best for the year. Ronnie and Clint manage a 100 cow commercial Balancer based herd.

Herd records are vitally important to our herd improvement. Without good record keeping it is impossible to make deductions that are based on accurate data.

Another key to our improvement is the use of EPDs in bull and heifer selection. Heifers are selected or culled on numbers before even being looked over for confirmation and disposition. Of course, we have learned bull selection is one of the biggest impacts you can have on your herd.

We also ALWAYS do BSEs every bull every year.

We continue to work on improving our grazing management. We have added waterlines to all our pastures and that has been a huge help. We want to do a better job on soil testing and weed management.

On the genetics side, our MBCC bulls have helped us develop a herd of cows that are hard workers. They don't need to be "pampered". They produce healthy calves year after year and show longevity in the herd.



How Much to Pay for a Bull?

This question is frequently debated and the most common answer is an average bull is worth the value of 5 feeder steers or 3 finished steers. Let's do the math. If 550# steers are worth \$195/cwt, that is \$1073/steer or \$5365 for 5 feeders. Finished steers at 1400# are bringing \$155/cwt or \$2170/steer with 3 worth \$6510.

Your goal should always be to get the most bull for your money. If you can get a very high-quality bull that meets your goals for less than these values, you made a very good buy (and we are 100% sure that many MBCC bulls will sell below this value). The trap is when the bargain bull is not high quality and he is only a bargain the day you purchase him and then costs you every day thereafter.

An average bull sires about 100 calves in his lifetime. Many of ours last longer and sire more than that, but we will use that number.

A \$3000 bull has a cost of \$30/calf while a \$6000 bull has a cost of \$60/calf. Can the \$6000 bull be \$30/calf more valuable to you? What is calving ease, docility, higher weaning weights, more calves weaned, higher fertility females, no feet problems, etc. worth to you? (lose one heifer due to calving problems in this 5 years and you've paid for the better bull) Very quickly the 'expensive' bull becomes a much better value to your herd.

The Feedbunk by Chris Muegge, Ruminant Nutritionist

With every passing year it seems the correlation between mud and calving season grows stronger. The relationship between mud and cow nutrition may seem “loose” but as good cow managers we must consider that every unit of energy used to maintain body heat or to trudge through a mud is energy robbed for cow maintenance, milk production, colostrum quality, and calf health.

Mud covered hides reduce the insulation effect of the animal’s hair. This can also limit the ability of the animal to shiver, which helps to create heat. As a rule of thumb, every 4-8 inches of mud reduces cow’s intake by 15%. This means a cow standing in a foot of mud will eat 30% less. This is especially important in lactating cows since milk production increases their energy requirements by more than 20%. As we have discussed in previous articles, lactating cows not meeting their nutrient requirements have a longer anestrus period, poor milk production, and poor calf performance.

While it may be too late to make major renovations for this season, there are a few things we can consider, plan, and do;

- 1) **Consider:** We would be ignoring the obvious if we did not question our calving season selection. Calving later in the spring offers drier conditions, warmer weather, and fresh pasture. Most late spring calving herds have lower calf morbidity, earlier breed back, and a lower feed bill.

- 2) **Plan:** Major renovations are likely out of the question now, but it is a great time to take notes. Where does the water collect? Is there enough slope in the feeding areas? Where are the highest traffic areas? Can we incorporate a heavy use area for concrete or geo-cloth incorporation? If you are planning on improving your pen this summer, identify a manure storage area (Figure 1). This needs to be a place that manure can be easily pushed into from around feed bunks, waterers, and hay feeders. It needs 2-3 walls (concrete barrier or earth mounds). Having the ability to push manure up when it is too wet to haul will greatly reduce the mud your cows have to walk through.



Figure 1 Manure Storage Area

- 3) **Do:** Mud and manure piled around waterers, hay feeders, and bunks are a great place for calves to get stuck, injured, and chilled. Take advantage of any frozen mornings to scrape these areas. Manure can coat hides and transfer bacteria when covering udders. Provide dry bedding for cows. Try to rotate newborn pairs to new paddocks or pastures that have not been exposed. During inclement weather, increase rations to cows to meet the energy drag based on temperature and coat conditions (Table 2). Stack straw or stalk bales as temporary wind breaks.

Table 2: Lower critical temperatures for beef cattle

Coat condition	Lower critical temperature
Wet or summer coat	59° F
Dry, fall coat	45° F
Dry, winter coat	32° F
Dry, heavy winter coat	18° F

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Bull and Female Sale

We will have 30 Balancers, 1 purebred Gelbvieh, 4 SimAngus, 1 South Devon composite, and 2 red Simmental-Hereford composite yearling bulls in our sale along with 3 Registered Angus and 2 Balancers that are 18-24 months of age. We have had a couple of requests for mature bulls and one of the advantages of buying MBCC bulls is that we help you sell your mature bull when you are done with him. If you have a 2 to 6-year-old MBCC bull that you would be interested in selling, give Mark a call. We may have a buyer.

Our unique sale format is designed to help you take home your top choices at the lowest price. There will be more details in the upcoming sale catalog and at www.mwbeefcattle.com. Each bull has a base price and on sale day we offer \$100 off if you haul your bull that day. This offer is good only on sale day. Bulls purchased at the sale and picked up before May 1 will stay at no extra charge. The bottom line is that you have the best selection on bulls at the lowest price on sale day.

In the female sale we have 3 Balancer bred females and 1 Red Angus bred female (some will have calves by sale day) along with 16 open females (Balancer, Gelbvieh-Angus-Simmental, Red Angus). Every female in the sale is DNA tested with her maternal index listed. Every female selling is replacement quality and each should be a tremendous addition to your herd.