

WCCCS: Determining Productivity and its Link to Profitability

In January 2014 a meeting was convened during the Saskatchewan Beef Industry Conference to discuss producers' claims that they had moved their calving start date to May and had seen reduced conception rates. Kathy Larson with the Western Beef Development Centre was part of that meeting because of her experience collecting production data from producers when calculating cost of production. WBDC's cost of production study is a very small sample size (typically 20-30 producers) and yes, some production data is collected, but details on breeding season start and end dates or cow:bull ratios are not. The reality is, we do not have current benchmarks on cow-calf productivity. So when producers raise questions about reduced conception rates related to time of calving, the benchmarks we have are 16 years old and the industry has changed significantly since then.

But that is about to change with the resurrection of a study last conducted in Alberta in 1998.

The Western Canadian Cow-Calf (WCCC) Survey is being rolled out across western Canada this fall, starting with the provincial cattle association district meetings from British Columbia to Manitoba. The survey was developed through a joint effort between the Provincial Producer Associations, the Provincial Ministries of Agriculture, Canfax, the Beef Cattle Research Council and the Western Beef Development Centre. In addition to being handed out at the District meetings, you are likely to also see the survey being handed out at events throughout the winter, such as **Brandon AgDays, Agribition, Cow-Calfenomics, or the Saskatchewan Beef Industry Conference.**

The questions have been revamped and expanded somewhat from the 1998 survey, but for the most part we are still asking the same questions on productivity and management practices of cow-calf producers. Questions like:

- What were your start and end dates for your 2013 breeding season?
- How many cows calved on your operation in 2014?
- How many 2014-born calves were weaned?
- When do you provide trace mineral to your cows?
- Do you creep feed?
- Do you pregnancy check?.

From the survey responses we can generate production performance measures for the industry. From the 1998 survey we learned that the average cow:bull ratio was 26:1, the average wean weight was 576 lb, the average breeding season length was 93 d, and the average conception rate was 95.6%. We also learned that on average 48% of cows calved in the first 21d of the calving season, that 30% of operations quality tested their forage, that less than 50% of operations pregnancy checked. That was 16 years ago, how do you think we fair now?

Knowing production performance benchmarks is important. Management practices influence productivity and productivity influences profitability. Increasing productivity through a management practice change can lead to increases in the total pounds of calf weaned on an operation which increases profitability.

Results from the WCCC survey will identify where we have strengths and where we can make improvements on our production practices and performance measures. We can also use the survey

findings to guide research and extension to improve the productivity and profitability of cow-calf producers.

The survey is 58 questions long and should take between 30 and 45 minutes to complete. There is also an online version of the survey on Western Beef's website: www.wbdc.sk.ca/wcccs.htm. The website also has additional information about the WCCC survey. For those completing hard copy or paper surveys, paid postage labels are included with the survey or available for download from the WBDC website.

On the last page of the survey, survey respondents can ask to receive a complimentary report summarizing their production measures based on their survey responses. This allows for comparison with the benchmarks. The production benchmarks will be summarized by region, province and herd size and will be ready for sharing in Spring 2015.

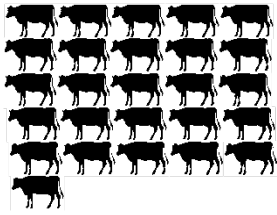
Over 1,700 producers participated in the 1998 survey. With a bit of friendly competition between the provinces, we should easily surpass that number. Which province's producers will get the bragging rights on highest conception rate or highest wean rate? Fill out the survey to help us find out.

If you have any questions about the survey, provincial contacts:

British Columbia	Alberta	Saskatchewan	Manitoba
Clint Ellison BC Ministry of Agriculture Ph: 250-260-4613 clint.ellison@gov.bc.ca	Barry Yaremicio Alberta Agriculture & Rural Development Ph: 403-742-7926 barry.yaremicio@gov.ab.ca	Kathy Larson Western Beef Development Centre Ph: 306-930-9354 klarson.wbdc@pami.ca	Ben Hamm Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development Ph: 204-425-5050 benjamin.hamm@gov.mb.ca

Or visit www.wbdc.sk.ca/wcccs.htm

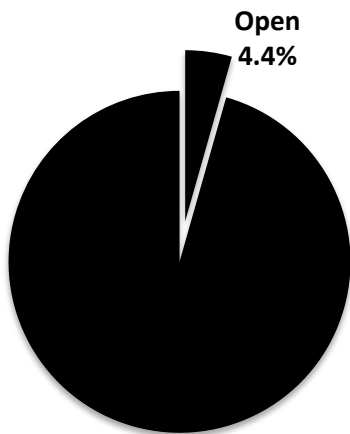
Figure 1. 1998 Productivity Survey Findings



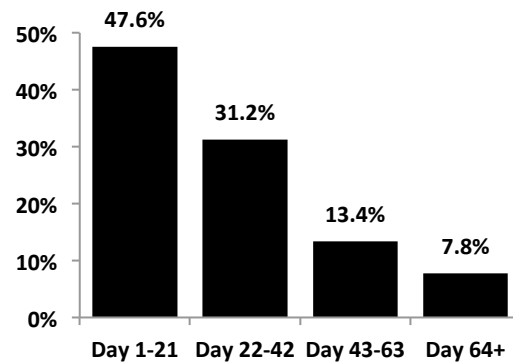
Avg. cow-to-bull ratio: 26:1



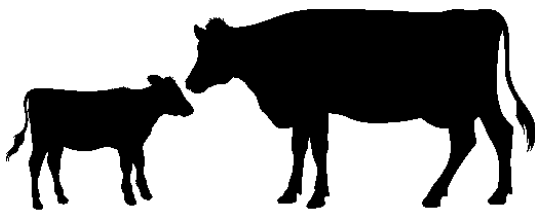
Avg. breeding season length: 93 days



Avg. Conception Rate: 95.6%
 {# Females Bred per # Females exposed}



Avg. Calving Distribution
 {% Females Calved every 21 d of Calving Season}



Avg. Wean Rate: 85.6%
 {# Calves weaned per # Cows exposed}



Avg. Lbs Weaned per Cow Exposed: 505 lb

Source: 1998 Alberta Beef Herd Analysis Survey, 1997 Breeding to 1998 Weaning

