

# LOW COST COW/CALF PROGRAM

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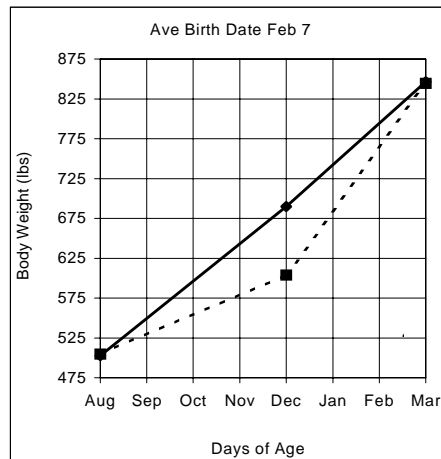
### Calving Season

Following completion of a School in Portage, Manitoba, my wife Corinne and I drove along the Yellowstone River from Glendive, MT through Livingston, MT. We were headed for Dillon to give a speech. We had driven this stretch of I-94/90 before and have been known to cast a fly into this beautiful stream. There was no fishing on this trip though because it was late February '07 and bitterly cold. Listening to the weather reports along the route, it became obvious that we had just left an area that had experienced record cold for the previous day. The skies cleared as we traveled west. The radiant heat felt great. As we approached Glendive, we spotted a couple of bald eagles. Our thoughts were that this was nature at its finest. The river ahead was likely frozen and (in lieu of fish) the big birds were out searching for little earthbound fuzzies that might stray from their holes. There were more eagle sightings and yet more. What in the world was going on? We soon came upon a set of corrals, with a barn and a ranch house nearby. There we saw the eagles, probably 5 or 6. One or two were actually in the pens, another couple just outside the fence, one on the fence and even one perched high above on a telephone pole. The cows in the corrals were not only pulling hay from the racks but some were calving and some had calved. The eagle lunch featured fresh placentas and dead calves. Corinne asked, "how can this be?" I answered, "weaning weight." I tried to explain that this rancher was production orientated and his goal was to wean a heavy calf by the coming fall. Winter calving was an essential part of his production program. She commented, "is the weight of the eagles included?"

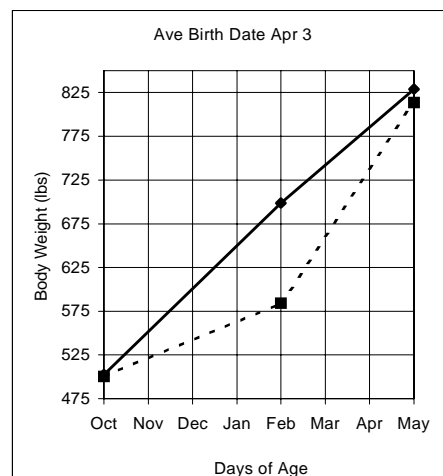
### Change A-Comin'

Researchers at the Fort Keogh Research Laboratory at Miles City, MT<sup>1</sup> have (for the past several years) been changing up their herd to calve at different times of the year. They recently reported on the per-

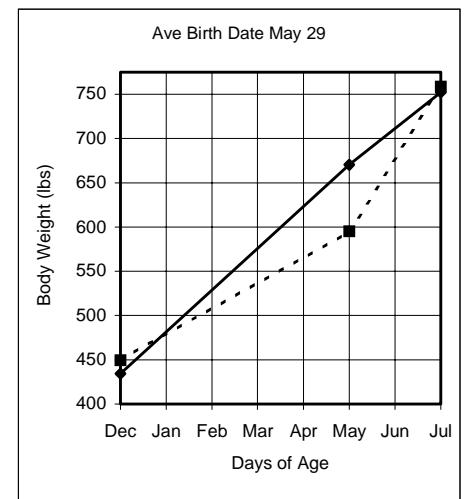
formance of the heifer offspring from those herds. It is a very detailed study involving 12 treatment groups. Six of those groups, from 3 calving seasons, are discussed here. Heifer calves were from herds with average calving dates of Feb 7, April 3 and May 29. The calves were weaned at 190 days of age. During pre-weaning, the pairs were in pastures and supplemented with hay - according to the weather, condition of the cows and available feed resources. After weaning, the heifers were split into two dietary groups. One group was managed for constant gain (CG) until breeding (phase 1) and the other for a period of delayed gain (DG), followed by a period of rapid gain (phase 2). The figure below



shows the performance of the Feb-born heifers. Ave body weight was 504 lb at weaning. At the conclusion of phase 1 (128 days), the CG cattle weighed 690 lbs while the DG heifers weighed 604 lbs. After phase 2 (91 days), the CG heifers weighed 847 lbs and the DG, 844. They



caught up. The post-weaning performance (of heifers born in April) is shown on the previous figure. At weaning (190 days), the average weight was 501 lb. Gain during phase 1 (130 days) was 196 lb and 84 lb for the CG and DG cattle, respectively. By the end of the 91-day second phase, weights were similar at 829 lb for CG and 813 lb for DG. Heifers born (on average) on May 29 were more than 50 lb lighter than the heifers from the two early-calving periods, when weaned at 190 days. The figure below shows that weight difference



remained through both phases 1 and 2. This weight discrepancy likely was due to variations in rainfall. In a follow-up study, body weights were similar for all treatments. At the time of breeding, the heifers were returned to their respective cow herds. All cattle were exposed to bulls for 32 days. Pregnancy rates did not differ among the three calving seasons.

### Schools In 2007/'08

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Dick Diven

Agri-Concepts, Inc.

11098 N Desert Flower Dr

Tucson, AZ 85737-7051

520.544.0864

rhdiven@lowcostcowcalf.com

www.lowcostcowcalf.com

<sup>1</sup> Grings, EE, TW Geary, Re Short and MD MacNeil. 2007. Beef heifer development within three calving systems. J Anim.Sci. 85:2048.