

NEWS COLUMN

Jeff Lounsbery, Extension Educator/Livestock
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Don't Underestimate the Economic Power of the Cull Cow

Hopefully as I write this most of the area corn harvest is wrapping up and any late weaning, preg. checking and corn stalk grazing will occur with an open, mild winter to follow.

This is of course is the main time frame during the calendar year when most problem cows are culled out of the herd. (November through January). Depending on your operation it may have already been done. Irregardless, the cull cow market has seasonal moves and because a majority of culls go to town in late fall to mid winter it is normally the lowest market level of the year.

Cows that cannot make another production cycle due to being open, old, poor disposition, poor production etc. need to hit the road ASAP as they only cost more to keep than they are contributing. However, if you have a group of cows that you think can yet produce 1 more average or above average calf, strongly consider an early culling option for 2010.

Example: This example could have been captured all of the last 3 years. More so in 2007 and 2008 than this year.

Consider Early Culling

Each year cull cow/bull markets decline in October-January as this is the time the market gets flooded with the large cull run because of traditional marketing patterns. Producers can capture a higher return in this market by implementation of early weaning (90-120 days) and the early marketing of cull cows and bulls.

Example 10 cull cows@ .55/lb. on Sept. 5

$$10 \times 1350 \times .55 = 7425$$

Same 10 cull cows @ .47 lb. on Dec 5th minus .70/hd./day (90 days pasture/cornstalks) $10 \times 1350 \times 47 = \6345

$$10 \times .70 \times 90 \text{ days} \quad \underline{- 630}$$

$$\$5715$$

\$7425 (Sept. sales)

-5715 (Dec. Net sales)

\$1710 ÷ 10 hd. \$171/hd. profit

Annual culling needs to be done in order to maintain optimal productivity. The following are some culling criteria to consider.

1. Poor Disposition-consider this at all times. Cattle that are hard to gather or won't move with the herd. Cows or bulls that act wild or aggressive. There are simply too many tame domestic cattle in the national cow herd to put up with bad attitudes of any type.
2. Opens. Open means no production in the next cycle. With average animal cost to carry a cow in a range from \$400-550 it is very difficult to make up a year of lost production. Often times, open females especially if young are telling you that they do not fit your management and/or environment.
3. Structural Soundness-often times we only think of feet, leg, and hip structure /problems. This category also includes udder and teat structure, eye problems as well as history of

prolapse. Eye and prolapse problems so not usually improve. If eye problems get too advanced marketing animals can often become impossible.

4. Age. Four to nine are usually a beef females most productive years. I know of some producers who flat have nothing older than 10 as cows are simply culled due to being a decade of age. Cows nine and older are also the 1st age group to go when facing feed shortages and drought, etc. Within this age group cull the thin cows first. Heifers that are open need to go right on feed. Fat cattle price for these animals is usually very attainable with less than 70 days of feed.
5. Phenotype-use this as a chance to make your herd more uniform. Cows that are larger in frame that do not keep their condition are candidates for culling.
6. Poor to marginal producers-cull them now! If they are poor to below average producers they are not making you any money. Cows have to work for you. Don't get caught working for the Cows!

Income from cull cows is often not thought of as a major source of income to any operation but when you couple the income with the feed savings and added efficiency it can quickly add up to become a greater than thought of economic impact.