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## BeefTalk: Know Your Environment Because Cows Depend On It



**The challenges this winter have been many.**

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

While morning coffee discussions are starting to focus on spring planting, the strain of the cold and snow remains. The challenges this winter have been many. Cows have had to be moved, the feeding season is long and the cost of feed is high.

This past year's experiences tend to drive producers out of the business. At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, cull cows, excess bulls and calves were sold early.

We started feeding hay to cows, bulls and heifers in October. The feed inventory is adequate, but also created a \$100,000-plus invoice, which was paid.

The positive is that the snow should provide some opportunity for much-needed moisture in the area. The beef business cannot survive without moisture.

The center has used no-till crop production and incorporated cover crops into the cropping system. No-till will conserve moisture, keep desirable living plants present and improve the overall health of the soil.

Simply put, the soil is alive. However, just like cattle, plants need to fit the environment.

Developing cropping and livestock systems and then integrating the two systems is not easy. This is especially more difficult when moisture is limited.

From east to west across the northern Plains, not all locations are treated equally. A drive

Images

Growing Season	Precipitation	
	Bismarck	Dickinson
April	1.46	1.63
May	2.02	2.09
June	2.59	3.52
July	2.58	2.00
August	2.15	1.66
September	1.61	1.62
October	1.38	1.31
Average growing season	13.89	14.22
Annual average	16.84	16.61

Growing Season Precipitation

columns

**Dairy Focus: Dairy Focus: MILC Program Renewed** (2009-01-15) The reauthorized Milk Income Loss Contract Program has some new provisions. [FULL STORY](#)

**Biofuel Economics: New Energy Economics: N.D. Wind Energy Legislative Proposals** (2009-01-29) Existing and potential wind energy owners should review the provisions of bills introduced in the North Dakota Legislature. [FULL STORY](#)

**BeefTalk: BeefTalk: Know Your Environment Because Cows Depend On It** (2009-01-29) The challenges this winter have been many. [FULL STORY](#)

**Hortiscope: Hortiscope** (2009-01-29) Ron Smith answers questions about plants, trees and gardens. [FULL STORY](#)

**Livestock Market Advisor: Market Advisor: Economic Recovery Is Key To Cattle Prices** (2009-01-08) As the international economic situation worsened in the fourth quarter of 2008, cattle prices plummeted. [FULL STORY](#)

**Prairie Fare: Prairie Fare: Serve Convenience and Economy with Pasta** (2009-01-29) In these challenging economic times, consumers are stretching their food dollars with pasta-based casseroles and soups more often. [FULL STORY](#)

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along Interstate 94 from eastern North Dakota into central Montana vividly makes that point.

Even taking two sites near each other, such as Bismarck as the east and Dickinson as the west (approximately 100 miles apart), there is a noticeable difference. Lee Manske, DREC range scientist, reviewed the average weather data for the two sites during a 30-year period (1971-2000).

The two sites appear very similar in precipitation. For Bismarck, the 30-year average was 13.89 inches for the growing season and 16.84 inches annually. For Dickinson, the 30-year average was 14.22 inches for the growing season and 16.61 inches annually. However, upon closer evaluation, there is a difference.

The early growing season (April, May and June) precipitation was 6.27 inches for Bismarck and 7.44 inches for Dickinson. The midseason (July and August) precipitation was 4.73 inches for Bismarck and 3.85 inches for Dickinson. The late-season (September and October) precipitation numbers were very similar for both sites, 2.89 inches in Bismarck and 2.93 inches in Dickinson.

Now let's look at temperatures during the same period. The early growing season temperature for Bismarck was 54.5 degrees, midseason 69.6 degrees and late-season was 51.3 degrees. For Dickinson, the early growing season temperature was 52.4 degrees, midseason 67.7 degrees and late-season 49.4 degrees.

In summary, Dickinson has a cooler average temperature than Bismarck and receives almost 19 percent more rain during the early growing season, but receives almost 19 percent less rain during the middle of the growing season.

Does such difference in long-term weather change an environment? Well, look out your window. What does that mean in dry years?

In 2008, Bismarck received 94 percent of its normal, long-term average precipitation during the early growing season and 84 percent during the middle of the growing season. Dickinson received 60 percent of its normal, long-term average precipitation in the early growing season and 71 percent during the middle of the growing season.

Overall, Bismarck received 101 percent of its long-term average precipitation for the growing

season. Dickinson received 66 percent of its long-term average precipitation for the growing season.

There is something about going west. The west is slightly cooler and has good spring rains, but there is a good chance that moisture will be lacking by midseason. A midseason with a shortage of moisture is a tough time to plant alternative forage, but it is even worse in dry years.

As beef producers, plan early. Like most years, if those early season rains don't add up, especially two years in a row, late-season alternatives are scarce, at least in southwestern North Dakota.

Know your environment and then plan and plant accordingly. Your cows depend on it.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>.

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

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#### NDSU Agriculture Communication

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#### Attachments

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