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## **BeefTalk: Weather Change Heightens Awareness of Weaning Time**

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Weaning and winter. They're almost synonymous in the beef cattle business. As daylight hours diminish and cooler October temperatures approach, producers begin to think about weaning calves in mid- to late-October -- the average weaning, or processing, time for the last 20 years.

Forage availability does not seem to move this date substantially. At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, our weaning date was set prior to spring turn out. There is little justification to lengthen the grazing season because maximum use of forage is a major goal to begin with.

Dry grazing seasons cause us to consider weaning calves earlier. At the Center, we moved cattle off grass Oct. 12, 14 days early. Because we have sufficient crop residue, we will be able to wean on Nov. 7-9 as originally planned.

In the recent past, early weaning has been discussed often but not many producers have implemented this practice.

In the only obvious trend, producers tended to work cattle a week later in the 1970s and early 1980s than they do now. For example, the average working date in 1980 and 1985 was Oct. 28 and Oct. 26, respectively. In 1990,

1995, and 1998 the average working date was Oct. 13, Oct. 17 and Oct. 16, respectively. The dry weather of the late 1980s, particularly in 1988, caused producers to work cattle early (Oct. 8). This seems to be the dividing line, because producers have remained in mid-October since then.

I'm not sure of the real reason why producers moved their calf working dates up a week.

Generally, sometime between Oct. 10 and Oct. 31, more than half the calves that are processed through the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA) are run through the chute and scale. The average over the past 20 years has been Oct. 18.

Producers seem to desire a balance between feeding harvested feed versus letting the cow/calf pairs harvest the feed themselves. The common thought is to maximize the ability of the cow to harvest and minimize the amount of additional inputs required to harvest and transport winter feed supplies. NDBCIA data suggests producers plan on cool season spring grazing, summer warm season grazing and using annual grazing crops or harvested crop aftermath until the middle of October.

Currently, once the second week of October passes, producers are ready to move cattle whenever needed. If fall residue is sufficient, calves will stay. At the first hint of old man winter, North Dakota producers are poised to move cattle. Calves will move into private backgrounding lots or straight to the local auction barn. The cows will head back to harvest the last fall forage and hopefully have another month or two of adding value to North Dakota's most forgotten crop, assorted stubbles.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://www.BeefTalk.com)

For more information, contact the NDBCIA, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to [www.CHAPS2000.COM](http://www.CHAPS2000.COM) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0010.

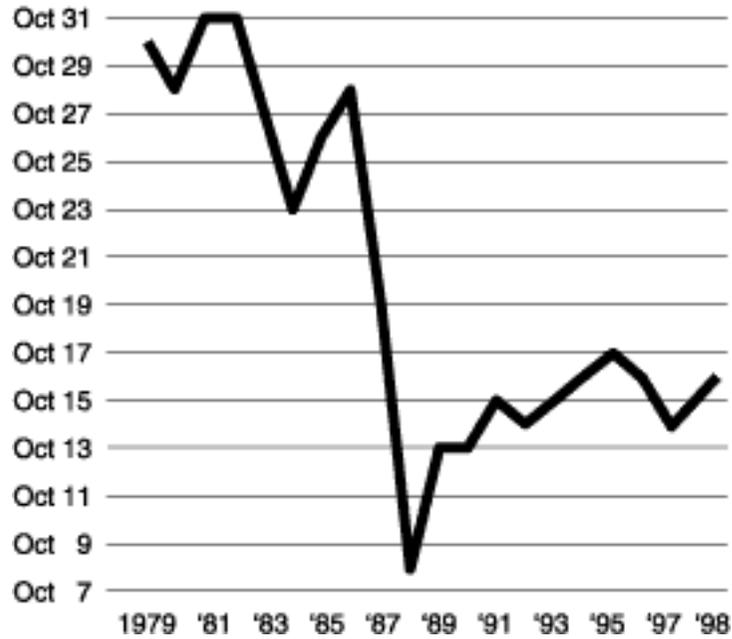
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**Source:** Kris Ringwall, (701) 483-2045

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## Processing Date for Calves

Based on N.D. Beef Cattle Improvement Association data.



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