

## Cull Cows Now or Take 40 Cents on the Dollar Come Fall

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Managers are paid to think and make decisions. Much of what we teach is by our actions, not by our words. Our actions do indicate our thoughts, at least as they apply to the management of the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center, and in general can be extrapolated to other situations.

This is the time of year when you are very pleased with most of the cow herd, and displeased with those few cows not nursing a calf. Pasture space is questionable and extra mouths tend to mean overgrazing, and not a lot of extra income.

That raises the perennial spring question: Do we hold the dry cows or do we sell? Last year, we held on to the cull cows well into the summer with hopes of extra gain, condition and at least a top dollar price for the season. Was that the right decision?

Typical cull weight last year for the August culls was just over 1,100 pounds. This time of year, the cows would be lighter, but not significantly. The bottom line: I can sell a cull cow now for at least \$450 or, like last year, hold them until later. Last year the cull cows sold for an average of \$461 in August or approximately \$40 per hundredweight.

Tim Petry, NDSU Extension Service livestock economist, notes that cull cow markets start the year generally around the yearly average, increase to a seasonal high in March and April, and slowly return to the yearly average in August. That means only one thing: don't hold open or dry cows until the fall, unless you plan to rebreed them and target the bred market. Last year I would say we did alright, the August price was still \$10 per hundredweight over the prices we received in November.

A major managerial challenge is the vertical integration of a beef operation within a beef operation. Those challenges come about when we start expanding the existing cow-calf enterprise to include feeding cattle,

such as the dry cows. The typical thinkers will search out the potential returns for each production decision by gathering available data, make several assumptions involving the data that isn't available and make a wild guess at how the interactions of the different managerial decisions affect allocated overhead costs. Based on these calculations, a decision is made.

Factors that do not enter into these thoughts are the implications to the labor and work flow of an operation. Perhaps the dry cow decisions are easier than we let them be, especially in years like this. Given the daily delivery of feed, being first in line, or quicker on pasture, the real question becomes just how much more do these dry cows eat than the cows raising calves?

Seldom are nutritionists concerned with this number, since if the cow is in production, she will either be converting feed for the direct production of a calf or be storing feed for future use. In this case, the cull cow is directly competing with producing cows and more than likely consuming more food than is needed. Open cows could easily eat 3 percent or more of their body weight.

Basically, now would appear to be the time to sell the loafers. They should still net you at least \$450 on a good market, and when cow costs run \$1 a day, you will lose \$30 a month until you sell her. If you wait until next fall, deduct another \$100 for the traditional market decline. In this case, the lack of making the decision will cost you 60 percent of the value of the cow today.

Don't play favorites. If she's not producing, just sell the cow. 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 North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 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 BT0142.

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## Considerations for Selling Dry Cows in May vs. November

Current May value	\$ 450
Estimated summer costs	\$ 30/month
Estimated November value	\$ 340
Total estimated summer costs	\$ 180
Projected net November value	<hr/> \$ 160