

# BeefTalk: Develop Drought Plan When Cows Are Close

**Producers need a plan should a drought develop.**

By Kris Ringwall

NDSU Extension Beef Specialist

Dry weather continues to prevail and, despite the fact that a light rain is falling as I write this column, producers need a plan should a drought develop. The fundamental point is that decisions need to be made early on in a drought strategy.

Stocking rate, a function of the number of cattle, acres, available grass and the days needed for grazing, should be up for discussion. Even without dry weather, the stocking rate question needs to be addressed and part of a well-defined grazing management plan.

At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, grass turnout on crested wheat is early May. In planning the next step, turnout to native range and summer pastures needs to be thought through.

The focus today is the available cattle side of the question, rather than how much grass, land or time is needed. An expanded definition of animal unit could be "productive" animal unit.

Regardless if one turns out pairs or yearlings, the key is to go to pasture with productive cattle that will gain weight well. In terms of the cow/calf pair, a cow that will milk well and rebreed on time and a calf that has the potential to grow well, given the resources available, are essentially the products of a well-designed breeding program.

Cows that calved early or on time and are nursing an older calf will be in a position to take advantage of the early grass growth if rain fails to materialize later. While individual cow/calf programs vary, statistics show that cows that calve on time will suffer less calving drag if the season does become nutritionally deficient.

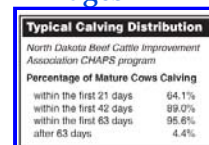
A calving distribution table works best to determine how to develop options on how many of the later-calving cows should be kept. Calving distribution is defined as the percentage of cows that calve during 21-day periods.

Using the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA) CHAPS program, for example, the calving distribution table calculations start when the third mature cow gives birth. The herd is divided into four intervals of 21, 42, 63 and 84 days and ends with two columns for cows that calve after 84 days and those that failed to calf.

Data collected by the NDBCIA through the years shows that 64.1 percent of the cows calved within the first 21 days of calving, 89 percent during the first 42 days and 95.6 percent during the first 63 days. Last year at the center, the third mature cow calved on March 15 and was cow P4098.

The DREC herd is very typical. In terms of the mature cows, 177 cows (62 percent) calved the first 21 days of the calving season and 84 cows the second 21 days. This brought the total number of cows calving within 42

## Images



Typical Calving Distribution	
North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association CHAPS program	
Percentage of Mature Cows Calving	
within the first 21 days	64.1%
within the first 42 days	89.0%
within the first 63 days	95.6%
after 63 days	4.4%

Typical Calving Distribution

days to 90 percent.

When it comes to stocking potentially dry pastures, the DREC could develop a plan to reduce the number of cows by 10 percent. Cows that calved later would need to be sold in an orderly way or some other management plan developed.

Other plans can be made, but the important point is that plans are being made in anticipation of dry weather. They don't need to be elaborate, but the cattle are up and sorting decisions are easier now rather than later.

Even if you don't have a calving distribution table, draw a line in the calving book at 21, 42 and 63 days after the herd started calving. At least consider sorting cows to have an option for reduced turnout.

It is always nice when the rains come, but anticipating reality still needs to be part of the management equation.

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.

---

#### NDSU Agriculture Communication

**Source:** Kris Ringwall, (701) 483-2348, ext. 103, [kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu](mailto:kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu)

**Editor:** Rich Mattern, (701) 231-6136, [richard.mattern@ndsu.edu](mailto:richard.mattern@ndsu.edu)

#### Attachments



PDF - Typical Calving Distribution  (bt041008.pdf - 19.80 Kb)



EPS - Typical Calving Distribution (bt041008.eps - 218.85 Kb)