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## BeefTalk: The Wind, Soil and Grass Are Dry



**Drought is the concern this year, so sort cattle into groups that could be sold if necessary.**

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

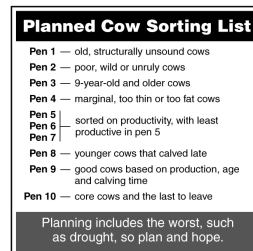
NDSU Extension Service

On the drive home this past weekend, I saw green grass. Once home, I felt the dry wind and dry grass and saw seeded fields that were not experiencing much growth.

In this part of the world, dryness is here. Throughout the years, I regularly have visited the drought map at <http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/> because drought and excess moisture are frequent concerns in the agricultural community.

Drought is the concern this year. The drought map

### Images



Planned Cow Sorting List - Planning includes the worst, such as drought, so plan and hope.

## columns

### [BeefTalk: BeefTalk: The Wind, Soil and Grass Are Dry](#) (2017-06-01)

Drought is the concern this year, so sort cattle into groups that could be sold if necessary. [FULL STORY](#)

### [Prairie Fare: Prairie Fare: Is Milk Good for You?](#) (2017-06-01)

Milk provides a wide variety of nutrients, including protein, calcium, potassium, phosphorus and B vitamins. [FULL STORY](#)

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shows dryness moving into our area and many parts of the country. Granted, weather can change quickly, but the drought monitor always has a lingering touch of drought somewhere.

Perhaps it is our turn to be that lingering spot. Regardless, somewhere dryness will prevail because the lack of moisture tends to spread out until significant replenishing rains come.

The drought map is a product of a working relationship among the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The drought map tool needs to be used and integrated into the cattle operation.

Pending drought is the unfortunate message, so today - not tomorrow - is the time to prepare mentally and plan. Cattle operations need to plan early because the biggest obstacle in working cattle is gathering the cattle. Cattle often are spread for miles, making the arrangements very burdensome.

Plus, fitting the cows into the working facilities when the full herd needs to be gathered is, in some case, not even possible. So, working smaller groups of cows and calves in a slower fashion generally yields more positive results than trying to force large groups of cattle through a set of facilities.

Plan, plan and plan. The plan involves knowing which groups to work to minimize the workload and impact on the cattle and crew.

To start with, think through the year and ask what management practices could be adjusted when feed becomes short in supply. Could certain practices be combined to get a better handle on the cattle, and could you discuss the expectations of how the cattle will be managed in the future? What management practices could be done early if the cattle need to be gathered outside the normal gathering times?

Review the hay inventory, project the upcoming hay crop and start getting a feel for feed prices. Do you have the capacity to refill some of the feed storage bins, hedging against an increase in prices? And then simply reassess when and how the cattle will be worked.

So, when the cattle are gathered, mark or sort them into logical groups that can be marketed should potential dryness force the shuffling of the herd. Keep in mind, the cows and calves need to travel together, so effective marking is critical to keep cows and calves sorted correctly.

Here are some practical suggestions for potential pens:

- Pen one could be for old cows showing their age by body condition score 3 or lower, and structurally unsound cows. Evaluate for injuries,

bad udders, bad eyes or other limiting physical defects.

- Pen two could be for poor, wild or unruly cows. These are the cows you do not want to handle with new or inexperienced help. In fact, even if you get rain, sell these first two cuts of cattle.
- Pen three could be for 9-year-old and older cows.
- Pen four could be for marginal cows that are too thin or too fat; either way, they have a questionable productive future, don't seem to respond to your management and make a logical group to sell later.
- Pens five, six and seven could be for cows sorted based on the potential severity of the need for herd reduction. If a few extra cows need to go, sell the ones in pen five. If a few more should go, take pen six. A big cut would mean selling the cows in pen seven.

If performance records are available, pens five, six and seven could be an increasing expectation based on the cows' expected producing ability. In other words, pen five would be the least productive cows, and pen seven would be the more productive cows that wean more pounds of calf per unit of input.

This also may be a time to assess cow size and sort the larger cows into pen five, thus slowly moving out higher-input cows.

Next, be critical of late-calving cows and develop some packages of bred cows that do not match your desired calving time or management.

- Pen eight implies substantial herd reduction and would include younger cows that did not calve in the first three weeks of the calving seasons, that is, those calving late, realizing they will not produce as heavy a calf. Selling these cows will allow for the retention of more of the super-productive 5- to 8-year-old cows.
- Pen nine simply could be a list of all the good cows based on production, age and calving time. These are good cows.
- The last thought is pen 10. These are the going-out-of-business cows and the last that would leave. These are the core cows, but planning includes the worst, so plan and then hope.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact your local NDSU Extension Service agent (<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/directory>) or Ringwall at the Dickinson Research Extension Center, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601; 701-456-1103; or [✉kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu](mailto:kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu).

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NDSU Agriculture Communication - June 1, 2017

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#### Attachments



[PDF - Planned Cow Sorting List -](#)

[Planning includes the worst, such as drought, so plan and hope.](#)

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[EPS - Planned Cow Sorting List -](#)

[Planning includes the worst, such as drought, so plan and hope.](#)

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