



BeefTalk 621: Tough Decisions But Cattle Must Pay for Themselves

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Fall Cow Sorting List

- Pen one — Open, dry and/or unsound cows, sell
- Pen two — Poor mothers, wild mothers, sell
- Pen three — Nine year old and older cows, sell
- Pen four — Marginal cows, too fat, too thin, sell
- Pen five, six — Cows calving outside the desired calving and seven season, sell
- Pen eight — All younger cows calving late, sell
- Pen nine — All lower-producing cows, sell
- Pen ten — Starting with the older cows, gradually reduce cows until ranch resources are met

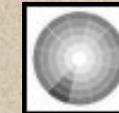
Given that feed purchases may need to be made, each purchase comes with an obligation to commit money with the expectation that those funds will be paid back in future cattle revenues.

The weather continues to make life interesting. I am tempted to say the weather makes life difficult. If that were true, life always would be difficult because, as long as the Earth spins and continues its rotation around the sun, the weather never will be uninteresting or constant.

In fact, if the weather quit changing, that would mean the Earth stopped rotating. At that point, we could rightly say that life is difficult.



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Sorry if a bit of reality is hard to swallow, but farming and ranching have been and will continue to be a game of chess between Mother Nature and a producer. Because Mother Nature is unwilling to take any advice, all the preparation and planning rests on the shoulders of the producer.

Currently, the drought or excessively dry weather card has been played. Although the scene is very similar to previous droughts, driving across lifeless, parched land is discouraging.

As summer comes to a close, the first step is to establish an inventory of our cattle, remaining pasture availability, carryover hay and potential hay production.

The ability to survive will be measured by a producer's ability to balance cattle inventory with feed inventory. Given that feed purchases may need to be made, each purchase comes with an obligation to commit money with the expectation that those funds will be paid back in future cattle revenues.

This is step one and is the most important point to the whole discussion of buying feed or selling cows. If no short- or long-term profit can be penciled in, then step two needs to happen. That is tough but life is tough, and living in denial only makes life tougher.

Regardless, the summer growing season is departing and fall decisions will need to be made.

Step two is to evaluate and adjust cattle inventories. In other words, now is the time to cull those extra market cows and bulls. The culling needs to be deep. However, culling deep is not a new concept to seasoned cattle producers.

Times change and, with that change, stocking rates and feed resources change as well. As a reminder, those changes in inventory should start with a no-excuse mind-set. All open or structurally unsound cows need to go.

Even though the cows were evaluated last spring, now is the time to pregnancy check and evaluate for summer injuries that only will become major as time goes on. In addition, look for cows that are dry, even though they were sent to pasture with a calf at side.

Calves have a way of finding milk, even if their own mother was not the source, so poor mothers must go. Wild mothers also must go.

In high-cost years, do not gamble on marginal cows because some will be marginalized with winter and their value lost.

Be critical of late-calving cows and develop some packages of bred cows that do not match your desired calving time. For example, sell the younger cows that did not calve in the first three weeks of the calving season. One realizes that these late-calving cows will not produce as heavy of a calf.

Allow for the retention of super-productive 5- to 8-year-old cows, but get those old cows (9 and older) gathered and packaged for sale.

This fall is going to be difficult for many producers because input prices have translated into higher costs and the margin for error is gone. Simply keeping a balance is not going to be enough. The value of the calf must be greater than the value of all inputs, including purchased feed. As producers monitor costs, it does not take long to realize what is eating and utilizing the ranch or farm resources also needs to be monitored.

If one needs to go deeper, keep in mind that a cow reaches her prime at age 5, so 5- to 9-year-old cows have excellent value as breed cows and provide the maximum opportunity to produce big, high-valued calves.

Even though the producer may not get the rewards of the good breeding values, the cows should catch the eyes of those with feed at a well-advertised bred cow sale to help put some needed cash back into the operation.

There is no way to make old cows young, and young cows soon will be old cows, so the bottom line is to sort the most productive cows and sell the rest.

The financial world has been, is and always will be tough. Forgiveness is not commonly used as a financial term, so cows must bring a positive cash return.

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.

