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Add Value to Your Cull Cows

HARRISONVILLE, Mo. – Cull cows can represent 10-30% of the revenue for a cow-calf operation. Therefore, adding or changing management and marketing strategies could add value to operation's cull cows, says a University of Missouri Extension Livestock Specialist.

As fall rapidly approaches, cattle producers are getting ready to wean and market their calves. At the same time, many producers make management decisions on which cows met their performance expectations and are retained in their present position within the cowherd. Many producers sell their cull cows when they are culled from the cowherd. However, is this practice the most profitable marketing strategy?

When deciding whether to sell cows when culled or at a later date, first consider the seasonality of cow prices, said David Hoffman. Typically cull cow prices are lowest during the fall and early winter and reach highest late winter and early spring.

Add weight to thin cows. With an abundance of high-quality fall forage, cull cows can rapidly replenish their muscle and body mass. Adding cheap weight gains, with proper supplementation, to cows will result in a greater carcass grade. Higher yielding cows typically receive a premium (currently \$5-\$8 per hundredweight) compared to lower yielding cows. You will want to sell cull cows before they become excessive in their body condition (BCS of 8 or greater), as they will be discounted. Plan to market cull cows at an optimum BCS of 5-6.

When adding value to cull cows, select the best candidates to retain, said Hoffman. Select younger, healthy cows that may be thin (BCS of 3-4). Heavy-conditioned cows, unhealthy sick cows and older cows are generally poor candidates to economically add value.

When marketing, consider cull cows as a valuable asset to your operation. Be progressive in your marketing approach. Make culling decisions before cows become old, broken mouth, thin and emaciated. Typically these cows will be your poorest performers in the cowherd. Generally, adding weight or changing marketing time will increase the value of your cull cows and result in greater return for the cow-calf producer.

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