

## Culling When Feed is Short

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Is the feed supply short on your farm? If the answer is yes, then some animals may need to be culled. Which animals should be culled?

Deciding which animals should be culled from the beef operation should be a business decision. Emotions need to be left out of the decision process. Only the most productive and have the most profit potential should be kept.

When looking at the entire herd, a culling order needs to be developed. Start the culling with open cows followed by old cows, cows with physical problems and then cows with low productivity.

Always start the culling process with open cows. Cows that are not pregnant do not have the potential to make a financial contribution to the herd. Actually the open cow is a liability since she consumes pasture, hay, and other feeds and does not produce anything to sell.

Old cows always need to be considered in a culling program. After cows get to a certain age, their productivity decreases. In addition the possibility of them becoming a "downer" increases. Downer cows cannot be sold and will have to be buried on the farm. Then the cost of burial must be paid.

If there are cows with physical problems, they will need to be culled. Some of these problems could be arthritis, injuries, cancer eye or bad udders. These animals will probably never get better and need to be culled while they still have value. As indicated with old cows, they do not need to be kept until they have the potential to become downers.

Groups of animals that are frequently overlooked in a culling program are the low producers. These cows generally produce a calf every year, however, the weight and/or quality is not sufficient to sell for enough to cover all cow costs and still leave a profit.

If feed supplies are short, consider marketing calves instead of keeping them in a stocker or backgrounding operation. Reducing the number of heifers kept as replacement is also an option



during times when feed is limited.

In summary, when feed is in short supply, keep the most productive animals in the herd and cull the least productive. For additional information about dealing with a short feed supply, contact your local University of Tennessee Extension office.