

Evaluation And Marketing Of Cull Cows

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Cow-calf producers are faced with decisions regarding when to market and if value can be added prior to marketing. The marketing of cull cows can represent 15 to 30 percent of the gross revenue for the operation.

What determines cow value? First, a buyer evaluates the risk of a cow being condemned. Will the carcass or part be condemned? Condemnation means little or no value to the packer. Beef producers, buyers, markets and others handling cull cows should pay particular attention to cattle with limited mobility. Downer cows must be condemned. Other factors affecting cow value are condition, carcass

ing Utility grade is 80 to 85 percent lean with BCS of 4 to 6.

Will it pay to feed cull cows prior to marketing? The time of year is important as there is a definite seasonal trend in cow prices. A fall to spring program usually works well. The cows need to be fed 50 to 90 days to usually be profitable. Cows that are in thin to moderate condition can be fed for the longer period, while those that are fatter (body condition 5 or more) need to be fed a shorter period to avoid becoming too fat. Tennessee market news data also shows a small premium for heavier cows within a given grade. Cows need to have some teeth and be healthy enough to gain weight. Profitability of feeding cull cows will require the use of relatively cheap feeds, such as good quality hay,

Table 1: Grade Classifications and Lean Percentage of Trimmings, Body Condition Score, and Premiums (Discounts)

Classification	Lean Percentage of Trimmings	Body Condition Score	Premium (Discount) 2006-2009	Premium (Discount) Jan - Aug 2010
Cutter/Canner	85% +	1-3	-\$9.95	-\$12.80
Roning Utility	80-85%	4-6	\$0.00	\$1.83
Breaking Utility	Less than 80%	7+	Base	Base

weight and dressing percent (weight divided by the live pay weight).

The USDA and Tennessee Department of Agriculture Market News Service report prices for cull cows based on grade and weight. The table below lists the different market/ grade classifications as they relate to percentage of lean trimmings, body condition score (BCS) and price premium/ discount. Canner/cutter grade cows, while a high percent lean compared to fat, are usually extremely thin muscled and muscle mass is usually low compared to the total carcass weight. This grade typically has a BCS of 1 to 3 on a 9-point scale with 9 being extremely fat and 1 being emaciated. The canner/cutter cows are usually less than 1,000 pounds. These cows would be 85+ percent lean heavily discounted in price Tennessee markets. Breaking Utility cows usually have a BCS of 7+. The Bon-

feed byproducts or winter annuals.

Prices for slaughter cows are very seasonal, meaning there are times when prices are lower and higher. One of the periods when feeding cull cows should be most profitable is starting in the late fall, with marketing sometime in the spring. Considering the time period of fall 2004 through spring 2009, the difference in cow prices from November of one year to February of the next year averaged \$5.95 with a range of +\$2.81 to \$10.30.

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