



**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION**

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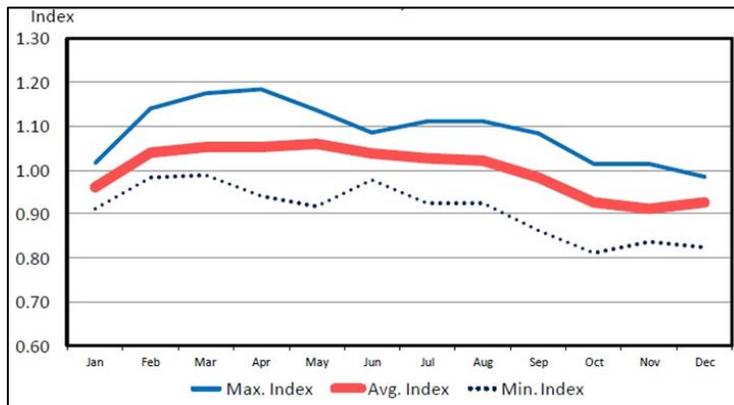
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### **Market Cull Cows Sooner Than Later**

With all of Colorado in some state of abnormal to severe drought conditions and an extended weather outlook calling for La Nina conditions, planning for drought will most likely include some culling of the cow herd. While culling is a typical part of livestock production, a drought year can create a glut in the supply and therefore decrease prices on slaughter cows.

When looking at seasonal trends for slaughter cow prices, high prices are typically paid during the late winter and early spring from February through May. Prices flatten during the summer and begin trending toward the lowest price when the supply is highest from September through January as producers across the country market cull cattle to keep from feeding them during the winter months.



**Seasonal Price Index for Utility (Slaughter) Cows, Southern Plains, 2004-2013.** Data Source: USDA-AMS, Compiled & Analysis by Livestock Marketing Information Center (LMIC).<sup>1</sup>

For Colorado producers looking to take advantage of high slaughter cow prices, timing this seasonal trend is one part of a successful marketing plan. Another consideration is the condition of the cows to be marketed. Slaughter cattle are divided into four classes based on body condition: light, lean, boner and breaker. Light cattle receive the lowest price due to their thin condition. Breaker cattle have the highest body condition, but boner cows tend to be the highest priced as they exhibit the preferred amounts of lean and fat. Increasing body condition of light and lean cows can improve the price received. As pastures traditionally green up in the spring and provide better

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nutrition, an expected increase in body condition should be seen in these cows. Since pasture grazing is usually the lowest cost feed, the input cost may be justified by the increased market value of cows due to improved body condition.

**Average Prices for Cull Cows**

<i>Marketing Class</i>	<i>Price (\$/lb.)</i>	<i>% Change in Price Relative to Lean Class</i>
Breaker	51.33	3.76
Boner	52.07	5.32
Lean	49.44	-
Light	41.58	-15.90

Source: Livestock Market Information Center, January 2004-July 2007.<sup>2</sup>

A final consideration is culling of cows with a calf. To try and market these cows during the seasonal high price period, early weaning may need to be done. Calves can be weaned as early as 45 days old<sup>3</sup>. Early weaned calves will require some supplemental feed, but studies have shown they are just as efficient in growth as normal weaned calves. Cows who have their calves weaned early can focus their nutritional intake toward their body condition and not lactation. A producer needs to evaluate the cost of supplemental feeding of early weaned calves with the expected increased market price of culled cows to determine the possible profitability.

For producers to receive the highest possible value for culled cows, timing of marketing and body condition of cows at time of marketing are the keys. Early weaning of calves from cows selected to be culled can help meet both desired market timing and body condition of cows.

## Resources

- <sup>1</sup>Raper, K. C. & Biermacher, J.T. (2016) Beef cull cow management and marketing alternatives. Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service Fact Sheet AGEC-629. Stillwater, Oklahoma. <https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/beef-cull-cow-management-and-marketing-alternatives.html>
- <sup>2</sup>Peel, D.S., & Doye, D. (2008). Cull cows grazing and marketing opportunities. Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service Fact Sheet AGEC-613. Stillwater, Oklahoma. <https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/cull-cow-grazing-and-marketing-opportunities.html>
- <sup>3</sup>Rasby, R. (2007). Early Weaning Beef Calves. *The Veterinary Clinics of North America. Food Animal Practice*, 23(1), 29–40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cvfa.2007.01.002>

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