



**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION**

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An Opportunity in Feeding Cull Cows

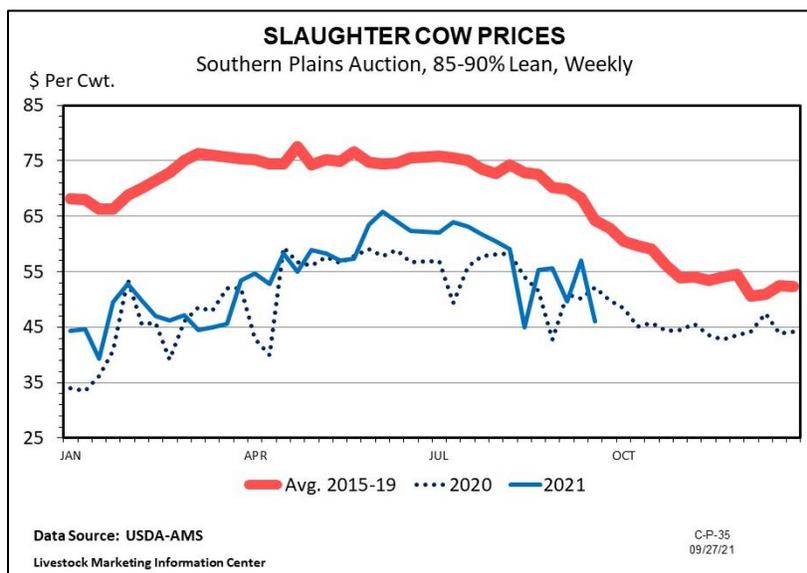
This is traditionally the time of year cattle producers will bring cattle to market including culled cows. These cows have been culled for a variety of reasons, but the base reason is a producer feels they will no longer be a profitable animal. This focus by one producer on their profitability may provide an opportunity for another producer to take an animal of low value, increase their value and turn a profit.

The lowest prices for cull cows typically come in October through December due to an increase in the number of cows brought to market.¹ Prices paid for market cows during this time can be 60% less than during the high seasonal prices in the late spring and early summer. Taking advantage of buying cows at the low price and selling at a higher price is possible if a few things are kept in mind.

A producer needs to identify cows that can be increased in value. Producers should look for cows that are not too old, are healthy but may have a low Body Condition Score (BCS). A healthy cow will be able to use feed efficiently as her body will be focused on growth and not recuperation from illness or injury. As for age, the younger the cow, the more likely she is to convert feed to gain. Studies show cows may continue to grow to mature skeletal size and weight until five years of age and possibly up to seven years of age. Younger cows that have not reached full physical maturity may be able to gain weight more easily.

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The focus for increasing value should be on increasing BCS and weight gain will follow. BCS can run from a low of 1 (extremely thin) to a high of 9 (extremely obese). A producer would like to sell a cull cow in BCS 4 to 6 to receive the highest price with cows providing good muscling and appropriate finish. Identifying cows who are BCS 2 or 3 and feeding them to increase to BCS 4 gives a producer the best possibility to turn a profit. Most cows can average a rate of gain of 2 or more pounds per day. Feeding them for 45 to 90 days can result in a weight gain of 100 to 200 pounds. A rule of thumb says for every 75 to 80 pounds of weight gain, a cow will increase 1 body condition score.² Therefore, a gain of 150 pounds on a cow with a BCS of 2 should show an increase to a BCS of 4.



Determining the price to pay for cull cows is based on two main factors: predicted cow prices and feed costs. Data from the Livestock Marketing Information Center (LMIC) shows the price difference from November lows of under \$55/cwt. to over \$65 cwt. in January is a change of \$10 to \$15/cwt. in a 60 day period. As an example, calculating for a 1000 pound cow purchased at \$53/cwt. (\$530), that gains a minimum of 2 pounds per day (120 pounds) and is sold at \$65/cwt., she could have an estimate end value of \$728 (1120 pounds X \$65/cwt. = \$728).

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The cost of feed is the other major determining factor in the final profitability. Using the estimated change in value over the number of days of feeding a producer can calculate their maximum daily feed cost. Using the previous example, an estimated \$198 increase in value over 60 days leaves a maximum daily cost of \$3.30.

A cow can typically ingest 2 to 3% of her body weight of feed daily. Continuing with our example, a 1000 pound cow will need between 20 to 30 pounds of feed daily. The maximum feed cost is then found by dividing the maximum daily cost by the maximum daily intake. In this, instance maximum feed cost would be \$.11 per pound ($\$3.30 \text{ per day} \div 30 \text{ pounds per day of feed} = \$.11 \text{ per pound}$).

Buying and reselling cows is usually not a high profit enterprise. Variation in the price at purchase and sale of the cow, the price of feed, the cow's rate of gain or daily feed intake could easily make or break profitability. Other costs including labor, transportation, and veterinary expenses need to be accounted for as well. Like any enterprise, there are risks associated with buying and reselling cull cows. Proper planning is essential.

Resources:

- ¹Peel, 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>
- ²Rasby, R. J., Stalker, L. A. & Funston, R. N. (2007) Body condition scoring beef cows: a tool for managing the nutrition program for beef herds. University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension EC07-281. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist/3541>

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