



THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
**COOPERATIVE EXTENSION**  
Colleges of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences & Family and Consumer Sciences

# Which Cows Do I Sell?

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There are several approaches to dealing with drought in a beef cattle operation. You can buy extra feed, wean calves early, creep feed calves, sell calves or sell cows. The correct answer for most people is probably to do some combination of these.

The current drought is spotty. Some areas are very dry, while folks a few miles down the road are in fair shape. With cow numbers down from several years ago, you may be able to locate pastures for lease or some not-so-hot hay that you can cut. In short, do some checking around before you load everything on the truck.

A 1,000-pound lactating cow will eat approximately 25 pounds of hay per day, and a 1,000-pound dry cow will eat approximately 20 pounds of hay per day. Many herds contain a few hay-eaters that should be culled. Culling a few unproductive cows can decrease stocking rate and generate a little cash to buy feed for the rest of the herd. Careful selection can help with the immediate problem and also improve the herd in the long run. Some animals to look for when culling are:

**Open cows.** As soon as cows are pregnancy checked, get rid of open cows.

**Cows without calves.** Cows that have lost a calf for any reason are expensive to feed for no return.

**Cows with physical defects.** Look for problems such as bad udders, eye problems and structural soundness.

**Older cows.** A cow's productivity begins to decline at about 10 years of age. Getting rid of these cows now will help future production.

**Cows with poor production.** If records are available, cull cows that have produced calves with low average weaning weight ratios. However, many producers do not keep records. The best approach in this case is to look at the calves with the cows now. Use the appearance of this year's calf to help decide on culling a cow.

**Late calving cows.** Producers on a controlled breeding program should look at calving dates of their cows. They may wish to cull a few of those “tail end” cows that may miss breeding next year. Culling late calving cows can shorten the calving season.

**Off-season cows.** If you are not on a controlled breeding program and are faced with getting rid of a large number of cows, now is the time to get started. Refer to Georgia Cooperative Extension Bulletin 1307, *Converting to a Controlled Breeding Season* for more information. The publication can be found at: <http://pubs.caes.uga.edu/caespubs/pubcd/B1307.htm>.

**Wild cows.** Any excuse to cull a cow with poor temperament is a good excuse.

Selling a few cows may be necessary in some herds. If care is taken in selection, producers may eventually come out of the drought with a better cow herd.

## Learning *for* Life

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