

# The Latest Across the Plains

## *Unused Feed*

“Tomorrow is the most important thing in life. Comes into us at midnight very clean. It’s perfect when it arrives and it puts itself in our hands. It hopes we’ve learned something from yesterday.” -John Wayne

## **Save Money \$\$\$ Test Your Feeds**

Tests are relatively inexpensive, usually costing less than \$18, for the information derived. Contact our office to set up an appointment to have us pull feed samples if we have not done so yet.

## **We want to hear from you...**

Do you have a question you would like one of the nutritionists to address in depth in our newsletter? Just submit your question through our website [www.GPLC-Inc.com](http://www.GPLC-Inc.com) and we will get to work on it.

## **Timely Reminders**

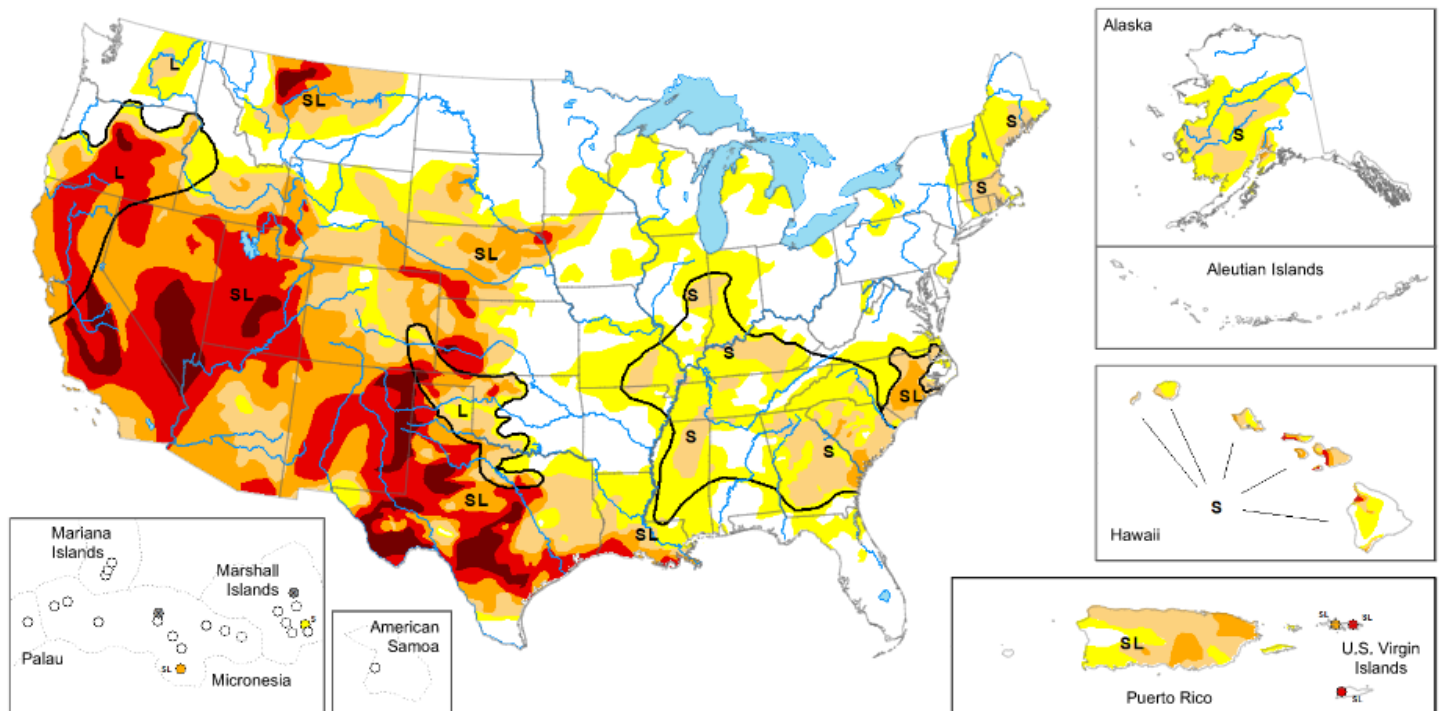
- ◆ Use at least two methods of fly control.
- ◆ Deworm cows and bulls with an injectable, drench or free-choice mineral de-wormer.
- ◆ Semen test bulls and make sure they have an adequate ration including mineral.
- ◆ Review your heat synchronization program and time-line.
- ◆ Put up shades.
- ◆ Make sure that waterers have enough space, recharge rate, and are cleaned weekly.
- ◆ Review your implant program with us.
- ◆ Review rations with current feed costs.
- ◆ Keep pens scraped.
- ◆ Implant suckling calves going to pasture.
- ◆ Have us run a feed budget to estimate your feed inventory needs for the next year.

## Calendar of Events

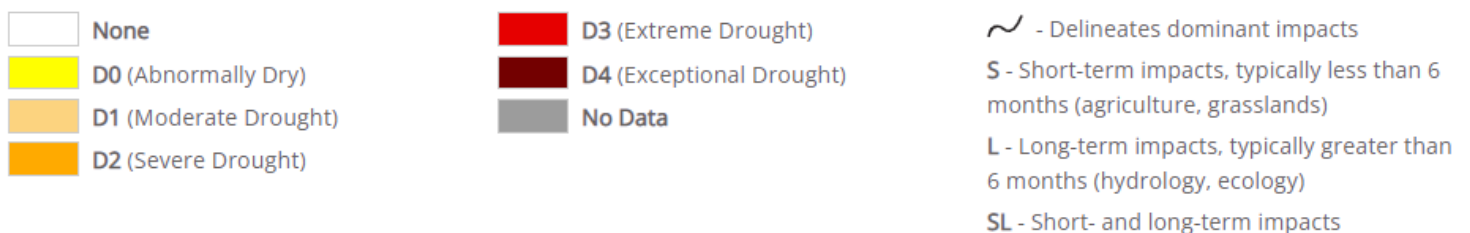
- **July 9** Women in Agriculture Farm and Ranch Tour, Hungerford and Wharton, TX
- **July 22 - 23** Oklahoma Cattlemen’s Association Annual Convention and Trade Show, Norman, OK
- **July 25 - 28** ANCW Cattle Industry Summer Business Meeting, Reno, NV
- **July 22 - 30** North Dakota State Fair, Minot, ND
- **July 28** So You Want to Direct Market your Meat to Consumers? Now What?, Online (<https://cap.unl.edu/webinars>)
- **July 29 - August 6** Montana State Fair, Great Falls, MT
- **August 4** Cash Rents and Land Values: 2022 Nebraska Farm Real Estate Update, Online (<https://cap.unl.edu/webinars>)
- **August 1 - 2** Texas A&M Beef Cattle Short Course, College Station, TX
- **August 11 - 21** Iowa State Fair, Des Moines, IA
- **August 11 - 21** Missouri State Fair, Sedalia, MO
- **August 26 - September 5** Nebraska State Fair, Grand Island, NE
- **August 25 - September 5** Minnesota State Fair, St. Paul, MN
- **September 1 - September 5** South Dakota State Fair, Huron, South Dakota

# Early Weaning Calves

Every year someone, somewhere is experiencing drought and this year appears to be no exception. The UNL drought monitor indicates that most of the southwestern portion of the Hi Plains and the West are experiencing severe to extreme drought, which is likely forcing producers to consider implementing their drought plan. Part of this plan may consist of early weaning calves to help stretch forage resources.



## Intensity and Impacts



For local details and impacts, please contact your [State Climatologist](#) or [Regional Climate Center](#).

Early weaning calves can reduce the forage usage of cows by 20-35% and their nutrient requirements by 25-40%, depending on the cows stage of lactation during the time of weaning. Early weaning is the removal of the calf from the cow at 90 to 120 days of age. At this time the calf still has clostridial immunity. At 90 days of age, the calf can achieve satisfactory gains without supplemental milk and at 120 days of age the rumen is fully functional. Therefore, we can feed a diet high in energy to achieve gains from 2.0 to 2.5 lbs. per day. This allows the producer the option of selling the calves in late fall or spring or the calves can be finished right on the farm.

The greatest and most important challenge when weaning calves is getting them to eat. Without feed, the calf lacks the energy to maintain itself and to power the immune system which results in

weight loss and increased incidence of morbidity. We would suggest feeding a creep feed to get the calves accustomed to consuming a dry feed 3 to 4 weeks prior to weaning. Calves should consume 5 to 8 lb per head per day of the creep feed. This will ease the stress on the calf because the feed fed after weaning will be something he recognizes by sight, smell and taste. Diets need to be energy dense and high in protein in order to maintain the same level of daily gain the calves were achieving when still on the cow.

In addition to dietary considerations, there are a few management considerations to think about.

**Provide adequate bunk space for the calves.** A minimum of 15 inches of bunk space helps reduce overcrowding during feeding time.

**Make sure calves can reach the feed in the bunk and water tank.** Early weaned calves are going to be smaller than traditionally weaned calves, so making sure they can reach feed and water will help get them on feed faster.

**Set up pens and bunk lines to contain early weaned calves.** The smaller calves are more easily able to slip under or through fence lines.

**Develop a vaccination plan with your veterinarian.** Having vaccination protocols in place will help prevent illness in those early weaned stressed calves.

**Clean pens prior to bringing in the calves.** Making sure you have clean open pens prior to weaning will help reduce morbidity and mortality.

Early weaned calves are typically very efficient during the finishing phase so if done properly early weaning could be a good option to help stretch your forage resources. However, early weaning does come with some disadvantages to keep in mind: increased labor and facilities, increased management practices such as vaccination/booster and creep feed, and additional stored feed to feed the calves. As always, if you have any questions about incorporating early weaning into your operation this year one of our consultants would be happy to speak with you!

## When in Drought, Cull Hard

Drought across much of the west and southwest, will undoubtedly result in some producers needing to cull hard after weaning. When grass and hay inventories are tight, producers need to think about culling cows in the bottom 10-25% of the herd based on individual performance data and observations over the last 2 to 3 years. Cows that on a typical year, may have stuck around for another year or two, may hit the road now because only the best should get to stay in a dry year!

**Cull Open Cows:** Feeding an open cow all winter does not make economic sense. It should be a standard practice on the ranch to schedule a time with a veterinarian to preg check all cows, and if drought conditions are present, that should be sooner rather than later. Doing so in a timely manner will allow producers to cull cows while they are in good body condition and before spending \$300 or more on their winter feed bill. Harvested forages and winter range can then go solely to the pregnant females left in the herd, ensuring that they are in top condition going into the winter, the next calving season, and ultimately next year's breeding season.

**Cull Bad Eyes:** One of the leading causes of condemned beef carcasses is still "cancer-eye" cows. Although producers have been doing a much better job in recent years of culling cows before "cancer-eye" takes its toll, every cow manager should watch the cows closely for potentially dangerous

eye tumors. Watch for small pinkish growths on the upper, lower, or corner eye lids. Culling these cows while the growth is still small, will allow the cow carcass to be utilized normally. If, however, cancer engulfs the eyeball and gets into the lymph nodes around the head, the entire carcass will likely be condemned as it is not fit for human consumption.

**Cull Bad Udders:** A very important criteria that should be examined in cows is udder quality. Beef cattle producers are not as likely to think about udder health and shape as dairy producers are, but this attribute affects cow and calf productivity and overall profitability. Research has shown that cows with one or two dry quarters have calves with severely reduced weaning weights (50 – 60 pounds) compared to cows with no dry quarters. Two key types of “bad” udders to cull include: 1) the large funnel-shaped teats and weak udder suspension. The large funnel-shaped teats may be indicative of a previous case of mastitis and cause the quarter to be incapable of producing milk. In addition, large teats may be difficult for the newborn calf to get its mouth around and receive nourishment and colostrum very early in life. 2) Udders that hang very low to the ground are quite difficult for calves of various ages to grab and should also be culled. Culling these types of udders from the herd will provide short term improvements in performance of calves, but will also provide long term benefits as well since udder quality is a highly heritable trait. Selecting heifers from cows that have good udder health over their lifetime will also be carried on through the herd.

**Cull Bad Feet and Legs:** Cows must travel over pastures and fields to consume forages and reach water sources daily. If a cow has been persistently dealing with bad joints, severe foot rot, or other structural issues, now may be the time to get rid of her. She will mostly likely begin to lose body condition if she remains on the ranch and the longer you prolong the inevitable, the more discounts she will receive from the packer. An animal that has been dealing with feet and leg issues for some time may be subject to substantial carcass trimming when she reaches the plant, so get rid of her now and try to prevent that.

**Cull Cows with Poor Mothering Abilities and Disposition:** If a producer must repeatedly put a cow in the head catch to let a calf nurse or if a cow has caused a producer to run for the fence, even one time, she needs to go. Yes, that cow probably does “produce a great calf every year”, but chances are that poor disposition is being passed on to that dam’s offspring and subsequently causing the producer more stress than it is worth. Life is short, sell the problem cow and move on with life. A producer’s fences, hired help, and their own blood pressure will probably all benefit from it.

And finally, we should ask ourselves:

**Is she good for another year?** What if a cow is pregnant, her eyes are good, her feet and legs are sound, and her attitude is in check, but the herd still needs to be thinned because of the drought? This is when the job of the producer gets tough. Questions that producers need to ask themselves at this time include: “Will she keep enough body condition through the winter to rebreed next year?” “How old is the cow?” “Does she have any teeth left and will she be able to continue to eat in an efficient manner?” “If she is bred, what stage is she in and is she keeping up with a consistent, yearly calving interval?” If your answers to most of these questions are positive, then maybe another cow needs to be culled in her place.

“Easy” culls are just that, easy. The tough culls in years of drought, separate the men from the boys in this case, the profitable and unprofitable producers. Deep culling is never fun, but it is a must when grass and hay inventories are thin and margins are tight.

# Summer 2022

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