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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Is Culling Cows a Challenge?

Cull cows can be a significant part of your bottom line for a beef operation. When do you cull cows? Why do you cull cows? How do you market your cull cows, or do you just sell them? These are all questions that can impact just how good you are at culling cows.

Year in and year out there are big runs of feeder calves at the market in October and November. For operations that calve in the spring (many consider January and February spring) this might be when they are weaning calves or a few weeks after weaning if they are pre-conditioning their calves. We have talked about weaned calves vs. bawling calves. The difference in price seems to be increasing according to several I have talked to at some of the local stockyards. Discuss this with the people you sell your calves with and your veterinarian for a good health program.

With big runs of feeder calves on the market, many will evaluate the momma cows once the calves are weaned. This takes us back the questions I asked in the beginning. If this is when you cull, could you feed the cows you are going to cull and increase their value? Shelled corn is just over \$3 per bushel off the farm right now. That is 56 pounds of corn. If you feed them 14 pounds a day that is just 75 cents per day plus hay. Fourteen pounds would be just a little less than half of a 5-gallon bucket, but that is just an example. Ten pounds might be enough. In any case, you can put some pounds on that would increase the value, but the additional pounds might also increase the price per pound. So if you can take a 1000 pound cow to 1100 pounds at 50 cents per pound that is an additional \$50. At the previous example rate of 75 cents per day of corn you could feed 66 days to break even if that is all you would gain. However, you can also figure that extra hundred pounds is going to fetch a few more cents per pound. If it is just a nickel, on now 1100 pounds that is \$55 more dollars. Ok, so now you paid for the hay, but you need to also consider supply and demand. If nearly everyone is weaning and culling cows in October and November, the supply may be higher than the demand. There are no guarantees, but the market is traditionally higher for cull cows after the first of the year, so there could be more money gained. This could be something to think about depending on the availability of feed and the condition of the cows.

With all of that said there was a good piece in the Beef Cattle Letter that the OSU Beef Team puts out every Wednesday. The information came for Roy Burris, a beef specialist at the University of Kentucky. It gets back some of my initial questions about culling cows. It is easy to cull the crazy cow that causes problems, the one that is open (if you will have them pregnancy checked), or other obvious reasons to cull. However, the one that has never been a problem and always raised a good calf, when do you cull her? Here is Roy's observation of the matter that he titled, She's Been a Good 'Un.

I mentioned in last month's article that picking a time to cull cows could be tricky. It is usually a straightforward decision in cases of open cows, lame cows or those with bad dispositions. However, culling old cows that have been "good ones" and are still producing can be a difficult decision. Despite



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all the “chatter” from our critics, we are the ultimate animal welfare people! We want to treat animals humanely but still be economically responsible. So culling cows while they are still healthy and have value but before they suffer the ill effects of old age is a part of good management.

Let’s take the case of cow no. 311N at the UKREC. She’s 14 years old and never had a bad day. Her time is spent grazing in the morning then walking over to the shade and lying down to “chew her cud”. She has also raised a good calf every year since she was two years old. So we’ve been good to her and she’s been good for us.

Cow 311N has a nice bull calf by her side this year but she’s showing her age. She is losing body condition for the first time in her life and is walking with a stiff gait. It’s time to make a decision about her future. A close look at her teeth reveals that she has a “smooth mouth” (her teeth are worn off). Grazing anything but lush forage will be a challenge and going into the winter with a calf at side will not be easy. She’s not moving well either. She has corns and abnormal hoof growth. So she may become lame very soon.

So what do we do? That’s not an easy decision but I think that we will keep her until she can wean this calf – put her in drylot and feed her if necessary. But we will not let her starve or die a slow death. You see; if we do this right, she will be culled while she is pain-free and still has value in the market place. And yes, she will be harvested as painlessly as possible, too.

Some opponents of animal agriculture might think that we should just let them die a slow death and return to the earth (and our water supply). But I’m kind of fond of 311N and don’t want to see that happen. We are committed to doing things the right way and, although it isn’t always easy, we should know better than anyone else about what’s best for our cows. After all, we have provided for some of them for many years on family farms (not factory farms!). Knowing when to get rid of the bad ones is easy but knowing when to cull older cows that have been productive is a difficult decision. Sooner or later we have to decide about the best course of action. Here’s to 311N and all of the good ‘uns out there!

If you would like to see the Beef Cattle Letter and the pictures that I did not include in Roy’s article, go to <http://beef.osu.edu>. Stan Smith puts the newsletter together each week.

### **Dates to Remember**

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| Dec. 11 | Pesticide Testing at the Old Y Restaurant at noon. Pre-register by calling ODA at 800-282-1955 or online at <a href="http://pested.osu.edu">http://pested.osu.edu</a> |
| Feb. 20 | Adams Co. Pesticide Re-certification at Frisch’s starting at 5:00 p.m. 3 hours of Pesticide and 1 hour of Fertilizer Re-certification. Must Pre-register.             |
| Feb. 28 | Brown Co. Pesticide and Fertilizer Re-cert at Southern Hills Board Office at 11:00 a.m. Must Pre-register.  |
| Mar. 2  | Highland Co. Pesticide and Fertilizer Re-cert at Southern State Community College in Hillsboro at 11:00 a.m. Must Pre-register.                                       |