

Herd Management and Feed Considerations

Monitoring herd health and the quality/quantity of feed can help inform management decisions moving into the winter months. Decisions on culling livestock and ration adjustments may have an impact on the overall productivity and profitability of your operation.

Herd Management

There is no one way to manage a herd of livestock, nor definitive practices that will guarantee increased profits or herd performance. Review the list below and do the things that make the most sense for you, your operation, and what you are encountering this season. Here are some ideas that you may want to address.

Early Pregnancy Testing and Culling Decisions

- ↳ Hiring a vet to come and ultrasound the herd can help with culling decisions in the early fall. Pregnant livestock can be retained in the herd to be fed over the winter and the open (not pregnant) ones can be either taken to auction or sorted out and put on a different maintenance ration.
- ↳ Depending on the progress of the individual animals' pregnancy, producers can sort their cows into groups according to estimated calving dates so that cows can be fed accordingly throughout the winter and into calving season. Groups should be made into age categories based on nutritional needs.

Early Weaning

- ↳ In many areas of B.C. pasture conditions have been impacted by the lack of moisture, which may result in lower weights of calves and lower body conditions of cows. The lower quantities/qualities of forages may have resulted in lower weights of cows coming off pasture this fall; lower body condition of cows can have a direct impact on calf weights.
- ↳ When calves with lower weights come back from pasture, they can be weaned off from mothers and fed grain supplemented rations or fed higher quality forage (pasture or stored) to increase weights before going to market. If calves are in decent condition after returning from pasture, they can still be weaned early and sent to market to eliminate the cost of feeding the calves grain. The table below outlines the three different management strategies that may want to be considered by a cow-calf producer.

Management Strategy	Wean and Sell	Wean and Feed for 30 Days	Wean and Feed for 30 Days
Weaning Date	September 1	October 1	December 1
Sale Weight (lbs)	500	510*	700
Market Price from 2023 (\$/lb)	\$3.84	\$4.09	\$3.19
Income per Animal (\$)	\$1920.00	\$2085.90	\$2233.00
Feed/Production Cost (\$)	-	\$156.51	\$370.23
Net Income (\$)	\$1920.00	\$1929.39	\$1862.77

Please note: Net income has been simplified for this example and is an estimate for demonstration purposes. Market prices fluctuate and may be different in 2024. 2023 market prices were obtained BC Livestock Producers Co-operative Association's Kamloops Market Pricing Reports using approximate dates to the weaning dates in the table.

*This weight accounts for weight loss due to stress from weaning and adjustment to new ration.

Caution: Monitoring animal health as they transition to a different and higher quality diet is important as sudden adjustments can impede growth and impact animal health.

Body Condition of Animals

- ↳ As mentioned above, cows that come off range or pasture can have a variety of body conditions. Producers can assess their animals based on body condition scoring to sort them into groups that can be fed different rations. A target body condition score for reproducing females should be a 3 to 3.5.
- ↳ For guides on body condition scoring animals, please refer to:
 - ↳ Beef: [Body Condition - BeefResearch.ca](https://www.beefresearch.ca/body-condition)
 - ↳ Sheep: [What's the Score: Sheep - Body Condition Scoring Guide \(AB\)](#)
 - ↳ Bison: [What's the Score: Bison - Body Condition Scoring Guide \(AB\)](#)

Grouping Animals

- ↳ Livestock can be managed more intensively if they are sorted into groups according to similar characteristics. Whether it is body condition, expected calving date, or age, grouping may allow producers to make changes to feeding and husbandry practices to fit accordingly.

Feed Considerations

Being mindful of the quality/quantity of feed can impact the overall health and quality of livestock in a producer's herd. By keeping an eye on pasture and cut-feed conditions, producers can manipulate their resources so that they are properly feeding their livestock while keeping extraneous costs low.

Pasture Conditions

- ↳ If forages and grasses on pastures have not had suitable growth conditions throughout most of the summer, then they will not produce as high of yields as expected. Since these crops were not able to regrow, producers may have to bring their cows back early from range. Bringing cattle back early allows the pastures to have less stress going into the winter to allow for plants to store energy in their roots and tillers in preparation for winter.
- ↳ Bringing cattle back from pasture earlier than anticipated can result in an increased cost to producers. If producers do not have pastureland close to home with sufficient forage for their livestock, then they may have to start feeding mixed rations which increases the cost due to an extended winter feeding period.
- ↳ Another consideration producers must consider is that the cattle on pasture may come back early looking for feed and/or water. Cattle that have been on pasturelands before usually have an instinctual feeling for when they are out of feed.

Feed Supply and Quality

- ↳ Drought conditions during the growing season can affect the nutritional composition of forages and crops. These changes in nutritional value can affect the ways that the resources can be fed to livestock so it is recommended for producers to test forages in order to adjust rations accordingly and ensure the animals receive the proper nutrition.
- ↳ After adjusting feed rations according to tested values, producers will be able to save money and resources rather than buying supplemental feeds. While feed tests do cost money, the money being saved by feeding properly balanced feed rations will be much greater than the test cost.
- ↳ Making these adjustments can also improve the efficiency of a herd's production.

Alternative Feed Sources

- ↳ In years affected by drought, first-choice feeds can be hard to come by as the demand is high and the supply is lower, which impacts feed prices. Producers who do not want to spend the extra money for their 'usual' feeds can look to alternative feeds that provide the same nutritional value and can come at a lower cost and potentially increase profitability.

Alternative Feed Sources (continued)

- ↳ Search out local feed options as there is less transportation cost and a connection between buyer and seller can be made more easily in person than over the phone.
 - ↳ Protein: Check for locally available products such as canola meal, peas, alfalfa pellets, supplement pellets, soybean meal, distillers, faba beans, urea, grain screening pellets
 - ↳ Energy: grain, culled potatoes, molasses, by-product feeds
- ↳ If you are adapting new feeds into your rations, connect with someone who is knowledgeable with that feed type to ensure ration adjustments are done properly to minimize unforeseen consequences.
- ↳ **Note:** that the quality of the ingredients is variable. It is recommended that feeds be tested before being incorporated into your ration. If feeds are being bought from a different area, ensure that the feed testing includes a mineral analysis.

Please refer to the [BC Drought in Agriculture](#) website for more information, resources and tools on drought for forage crops and irrigation management, livestock management and other topics, as well as financial assistance for agricultural producers impacted by fire and drought. Coming soon to the website will be a Livestock Drought Management Guidebook, with detailed information on feed and feeding management, forage management options and considerations and guidance on business/economics decisions.

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One-on-one support access

If you have questions and would like to follow-up with one of the Livestock Drought Management consultants for an individual appointment, please contact via one of the following to book a virtual appointment. When calling, please indicate whether you would like to talk about animal nutrition, forage management or economics/business decisions so that the administrator can best direct your request.

- ☎ Phone: 250-573-3611
Toll-free: 1-877-688-2333
- ✉ Email: drought@cattlemen.bc.ca

(Please note: these contact options will connect you with the BC Cattlemen's Association; however, appointment options are available to all livestock producers across BC and are not limited to cattle.)

Have any additional questions? Contact AgriService BC

- ☎ 1-888-221-7141
- ✉ AgriServiceBC@gov.bc.ca
- 🌐 www.gov.bc.ca/agriservice