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Farm Update

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Several Factors are Driving Strong Cull Cow Markets

Live cattle prices have increased to levels twice the average of years 2019-2023. The climb began last year and continued through the first half of 2025. I've shared several articles written by Dr. Kenny Burdine, University of Kentucky Extension Economist for Beef Cattle. The following is an article he wrote about record revenue being received for breeding cows culled from herds for no longer providing reliable conception success.

Cattle markets have been impressive across the board in 2025, and cull cow markets have been no exception. The monthly average price for 80-85% average dress boning cows in Kentucky set a record in June and may set a new record in July. June 2025 prices were 16% higher than June 2024 and 62% higher than June 2023. This is a trend across all regions of the US as demand remains strong and cull cow supplies remain tight.

The most obvious reason for the extremely high cull cow prices has been sharp reductions in slaughter levels. As I write this in late July, beef cow slaughter is down 17% year-to-date from 2024. If this trend continued through the end of 2025, it would represent a reduction in beef cow slaughter of more than 450,000 cows. The beef cow herd was culled hard from 2021 to 2023, so it is likely that a lot of poor performers had already exited the herd. And of course,

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the current calf market is encouraging producers to hold on to cows a bit longer than usual. It is also worth pointing out that dairy cow slaughter is down 7% for the year, which is also contributing to the tight supplies.

Consumer demand has been strong and has probably been overshadowed a bit by discussion of tight supplies. Ground beef represents a significant share of beef consumption, and a large portion of cull cow slaughter is targeted for the ground beef market. It is also likely that high retail prices are pushing some consumers towards lower priced ground beef, as opposed to higher priced cuts. While supply is absolutely a major factor, strong demand has added fuel to the fire.

Finally, there is another element that has not gotten as much attention, but that I consider to be significant. Multiple dynamics have pushed cattle to higher slaughter weights over the last few years, and that has led to a substantial increase in quality grades. For some perspective, 10.6% of cattle were graded Prime in 2024, and that percentage is running at about 11.8% thus far in 2025. This increase in marbling also means there is an increase in the amount of fat in the trim, which creates additional demand for lean trim to be used for blending. Since cull cows are a source of lean trim, this has also contributed to strong cull cow markets.

Stockpile Pasture

It seems early to be writing about your winter feeding program, but the time to start planning stockpiled fescue is now! Spring calving herds: Stockpiled fescue can be an excellent option for thin spring calving cows. Thin cows ($BCS \leq 4$) have decreased reproductive performance, and the best time to try and put condition back on these cows is during the period from weaning to calving. Fall calving herds: Stockpiled fescue can be utilized to meet the high

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nutrient requirements of lactating fall calving cows. It is important to make sure that cows remain in adequate BCS during the period from calving to breeding, and stockpiled fescue is an excellent option to decrease purchased feed nutrition needed to maintain lactating cows during late fall and early winter. Growing cattle: Stockpiled fescue can also be utilized for growing cattle; however, depending on your goal for average daily gain, supplementation may still be required.

Stockpiling should begin in early to mid-August. Fescue should first be grazed or cut down to 3 to 4 inches to allow for new growth. Cattle should be removed from the paddock to allow optimal regrowth time and maximum growth. Fertilizer should be applied in early August. It is best to use a soil test to determine the accurate amount of fertilizer needed in an area. Forty to 80 pounds of nitrogen per acre has proven to be optimal for stockpiling fescue.

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