



## Cattlemen's College

*Managing the Herd Through Long-term Drought,*  
Dr. Craig Gifford

*Albuquerque, NM—2022 Joint Stockmen's Convention:*  
*Transforming Challenges into Opportunities*

### Summary:

Much of the southwest is in a drought. There are two different options when drought strikes. *Option 1*—do nothing and hope it rains in the next 40 days. If not, overgrazing begins in 40 days, and the chances of capturing rainfall/drought recovery diminish proportionally. *Option 2*—sell half of the herd and wait 80 days for rain. No rain and no stock adjustment can produce a risk to long-term survival and sustainability.

What about management when 100% of the pasture available?

- Immediate management options: **Early Wean**
  - For every 2.5 days a calf is removed from a female, one more day of grazing is gained for the cow. This isn't economical but is an alternative to selling.
- Immediate management options: **Cull**
  - You should cull with future marketing in mind. Old cows and 2s and 3s will have the greatest energy demands. Energy is in short supply during drought. Weaned heifers have fewer feed requirements than mature cows, but defects, poor doers, horns, and other issues could result in poor calves.

### Key Points:

1. *Measure:* Keep the future in mind. Use standardized terms, definitions, methodologies, and protocols to take measurements accurately. Measure what's relevant.
2. *Flexibility:* develop a marketing plan that allows for traditional avenues and retained ownership and selling.
3. Weaned heifers have fewer feed requirements than cows.
4. Longer-term strategies are likely necessary (e.g., herd composition, grazing strategies, refined/targeted records).
5. No rain and no stock adjustment produce a risk to long-term survival and sustainability.

**Contact Information:** Dr. Craig Gifford — [cgifford@nmsu.edu](mailto:cgifford@nmsu.edu)

P.O. Box 850 • Moriarty, NM 87035 • Telephone: (505) 247-0584 • Fax: (505) 842-1766  
email: nmcga20@gmail.com • website: [www.nmagriculture.org](http://www.nmagriculture.org)

