This year's drought continues to affect Nebraska cattle producers as they move up management decisions to accommodate feed shortages.

With as much as 97% of Nebraska's pastures deemed in poor condition, most producers are already identifying which cattle will be the best candidates for breeding in the spring, according to University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension beef veterinarian Richard Randle.

"With the feed shortages that we've already had, likelihood is that there's going to be a number of those animals at a lower condition than we'd normally expect," Randle said.

Some herds will need to undergo closer examination during culling, he said, in terms of teeth, eyes, feet and udders, to further adjust to feed shortages. Randle said that farmers are working to keep their herds as compact as possible to help maintain the health of the herd.

"There's going to be more culling than normal," he said. "You have to reduce the herd to feel safe based on your winter feed storage."

Producers are also coping with drought-induced forage shortage through early weaning. Some of these calves may have been sent directly to auction, rather than kept on for backgrounding after weaning. Although most calves that are weaned early do quite well, Randle said the younger animals are at a higher risk. Producers who wean early should watch the calves more closely for any health problems.

"It should be consider if early weaning does take place, that they are at a higher health risk," Randle said. "It relates to having facilities ready to address those health issues."