



# Hay and Cows and Chaff and Stuff

By Howell N. Wheaton

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Poultry producers are crying foul – about ethanol. Recent spokesmen for the poultry industry testified before U.S. House Agriculture Committee on Livestock, Dairy and Poultry and blamed subsidized ethanol for much higher feed costs. They said that at least a 20 percent increase in retail poultry prices will be needed for producers to break even.

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After all is said and done, more is said than done.

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There will be lots of purchased supplements fed this winter because the 2011 hay crop was below normal in both quality and quantity. As a general rule Missouri beef cows will need more energy supplementation than protein. Even poor quality hay will usually furnish enough protein to meet a dry and gestating cow's requirements.

By-products are now the least costly way to supplement and stretch hay supplies. These include soyhulls, corn gluten meal, distiller's grains and other similar feeds. Conventional energy sources such as corn and milo can and will be used, but a word of caution about them. At present, they are the most costly options. Another reason to use corn and ground milo with care is that high levels of starch decreases the digestibility of forages that are already low in feeding value. Dr. Jerry Lipsey in his UMC days found that when more than a few pounds (4 or 5) of corn were fed per day it lowered the feeding value of the accompanying forages. Soyhulls and corn gluten did not affect the digestibility of hay in that way.

But despite the fact that "ole Mrs. Cow" has more needs for additional energy, than protein, feed stores ads are already pushing protein supplements like never before. And many, if not most of these supplements, contain urea as part of their protein source. This is well known, but somehow it becomes a forgotten fact, that urea in its self contains no feeding value whatsoever. It is a nitrogen source that requires lots of energy for the rumen microbes to convert this nitrogen into usable protein. This is usually referred to as a non protein nitrogen (NPN) source. Most of the protein supplements sold today contain as much as 1/3 of their stated protein

level from NPN. These urea laced protein sources are better suited to feed-lot rations than to cattle whose entire diet is forage based. The lower the forage quality, then the poorer the fit for urea-containing protein sources. Plant proteins such as soybean oil meal (SBOM) cottonseed meal (CSM) and corn gluten meal (CGM) are much more efficient sources of protein for cattle whose diet is hay and pastures.

Soybean oil meal has long been a major source of excellent protein for all livestock and is the base to which other protein sources are most often compared. For example, CGM contains about 20 to 22 percent protein, so 2-1/2 lbs. of corn gluten is almost equal to one lb. of 47 percent SBOM as a protein source, plus it contains considerably more total digestible nutrients. (TDN). This by-product feed is a very practical combination of a protein-energy feed that increases the quality of a roughage ration as well as to extend it. Soyhulls (SBH) while not as high in protein as CGM is also an excellent source to increase energy levels of lower quality forages.

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To be or not to be --- or to creep or not to creep feed? That has always been an interesting/complex question for most cow-calf producers over the years.

I have fall calved the majority of my cows for the past 40 years and have found that young 2 and 3 year old moms need a little help with their babies before green-up time in the spring.

However, my major creep feed for fall calves is good quality hay. I started this practice about 20 or 25 years ago and each year I am amazed at how much hay those little rascals consume and how well they do. My first choice for creep hay is a 2nd cutting grass-legume mixture. This can be orchardgrass or timothy that contains some alfalfa and/or red clover. It has been my observation that calves perform better on hay that contains a quality grass plus some legume, rather than a straight legume or a straight grass hay. The exception to this is our old friend lespedeza. Once in awhile in a so-called lespedeza year I am fortunate to have a small amount of mostly lespedeza hay. This is stored and reserved for creep feeding. Lespedeza hay or pasture is almost a fattening ration, almost like feeding a full feed of grain. Incidentally,

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The outlook for a mild winter is not in the immediate forecast. If this occurs coupled with the weird spring/summer/fall weather of 2011 there will be a major shortage of hay before green up time in 2012. First, a wet (in most of the state) spring delayed corn, soybean planting and pushed hay harvest back into late June and July. In fact, in this area it wasn't unusual to see first cutting fescue being made in late July and throughout August and into September. So due to the environment the first hay harvest was not only low in quality but for some reason the total yield was about 60 percent of normal. Then after a wet, cool spring came the high temperatures of July and August with little or no rainfall. So fall fescue growth, which many producers depend upon for a large share of their winter feed supply, has been about 20 percent of what is usually expected. For years, I have preached that producers should use fall fescue growth as a bonus and to have an alternate forage supply when a year like 2011 happens. Abundant fall growth depends upon 2 to 4 inches of rainfall between August 20 and the end of September. A check of weather records says this does not occur but about one year out of three or four.

So what can be done? Locking the barn door after the horse has been stolen will not feed the cows until next spring. The choices are not always pleasant but there are only a few things that can be done. The first step is to take inventory of the forage supply and calculate how much is needed to carry the herd through the winter. If it isn't enough, the choices are really only two: A. Reduce and/or cull the herd, or B. Make plans to buy feed and/or additional hay.

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Diets are for those who are thick and tired of it.