

Hay and Cows

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can be accomplished by reducing the time cattle have access to the hay. This method does increase labor and additional facilities are necessary. A recent Purdue University study found that hay supplies could be stretched by limiting access time to large bales fed in feeders. They gave 1,250 pound cows in the last half of their gestation period access to hay for 4, 8, 12 and 24 hours. All of the cows gain weight during the 90 day trial, but there was a significant amount of hay saved in the 4, 8 and 12 hour groups compared to the 24 hour or control group.

The 4 hour group used 37% less hay than the control group. The 8 hour group used 17% less and the 12 hour group only 4 % less. The conclusions from this experiment suggest substantial hay savings without sacrificing performance can be had by limiting cattle access to hay for only 4 hours each day. When I read this study, I remembered a field trip to the University of Nebraska research center at Ft. Robinson many years ago. A rather droll, weather beaten cowboy, who actually did the work, was given the task to explain the results of the experiment to this bunch of Easterners. Three groups of dry cows were fed their daily hay requirements in three different ways, one group (the control group) were given their hay daily, the second group were fed their daily requirement every other day and the third group were fed the total amount only once per week. The cowboy summarized it very simply – all the cattle did fine, all performed the same, but for the group fed only once per week and as I recall this only amounted to a total of about 120 lbs of hay per cow, he said – and this is a direct quote – “for the group that was fed just once per week you better have damn good fences”.

A great many of us will be supplementing the hay supply with grain this winter, so here is another “Wheaton’s rule of thumb” (I have more rules of thumb than I have actual thumbs) the energy or TDN in one pound of grain will replace about two pounds of hay.

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Everyone is ignorant – only on different subjects. – Will Rogers

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With the hay shortage on every ones mind I am surprised that the Ag Press hasn’t written something about using anhydrous ammonia injections to increase the feeding value of very low quality roughages such as wheat straw, corn residues, soybean stubble and late cut grass hays. It does wonders to these low quality forages. This procedure has been well researched and successfully utilized by many producers over the years. It is relatively easy to do and requires very little special equipment. The major costs are for the anhydrous and the plastic needed to cover the bales. For details contact the local Extension Office.

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In these times of very little if any fall and winter pastures, limited hay supplies much of it of lower than normal quality, high priced grain and supplements and overall expensive inputs on everything from vitamins and minerals to green red, blue and orange iron, the following items are some things to be considered, but there are no easy and cheap fixes for most cowboys this winter:

Cull and sell some cattle to reduce the number of mouths to feed.

Plan for and adopt alternative feeding strategies (as compared to normal) using combinations of purchased concentrates and by-products and existing forages.

Limit feeding of hay.

Minimize hay wastage.

Creep feed nursing calves, especially if hay is of extremely low quality.

Wean fall calves early to take pressure off of the cows, and it is especially helpful to young 2 and 3 year old mothers. It is always cheaper to feed the calves directly than through their dams. A dry cow can survive on some drastically low quality feed, especially for short periods such as 30 to 45 days before green up time. Calves may be weaned as early as 80 days of age without ill effects according to Dennis Herd of Texas A&M. I really prefer not to wean earlier than 120 days and AHIR will accept weaning weights at that age.

Let’s hope for a mild warm winter and an early spring in 2012.

God Bless!

HNW 🐾

Happy people, happy cattle

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calves. They’re helping to feed the world. Ask them for suggestions and input—an outside perspective never hurts and they might be happier if you show that you value their opinions.

Make sure they know that how well they do their job matters—not only for today, but in the long-run bigger picture. Do they realize that the way calves are handled affects performance, both in the feedlot and on the rail?

Many hurdles to happiness for man and beast can be overcome with more communication, more planning. That may not come naturally to every “get your hands dirty” type of manager, but it’ll be worth it in the end.

Especially if, by keeping those calves happily gaining and grading, you make life better for them, for your family and for millions of consumers. That’s sure to put a smile on momma’s face, along with all those others.

Next time in *Black Ink*, we’ll consider the common ground in diversity. Meanwhile, if you have questions for us, call toll-free at 877-241-0717 or e-mail mreiman@certifiedangusbeef.com. 🐾

