



Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan Inc.

Not Enough Feed for the Winter?

Getting through the winter when feed is scarce and expensive means getting the most out of every forkful. It is really an on-going management strategy in well-run and profitable herds where production costs are constantly pared to the bone. Planning ahead from the first sign of drought for available winter feed (quality and quantity) can get the bulk of the herd through winter without spending too much money or without sacrificing productivity the following year.

Match Feed Nutrients To Animal Needs

- Save best feed quality for after calving, next best for 60 days before calving.
- Group cattle by feed requirements to reduce over and under feeding: 1) mature cows in moderate to good condition, 2) thin and older cows, 3) replacement heifer calves, 4) bred yearling and rebred two-year-old heifers (or group 2,3 and 4 together).
- “Test, don’t guess” – Feed test and balance rations based on actual nutrients in the feed.
- Feed or inject vitamins; feed minerals free choice with salt or mixed in grain; use protein supplements with low quality roughages, especially with thin or young, growing cattle.
- Boost feed in cold weather, especially to young or thin cattle.



Total Nutrients Needed for Production and Maintenance

Dr. J.M. Bell, U of S

Minimize the Herd's Feed Requirements

- Use herd records to keep only the best breeding cows or replacement heifers.
- Pregnancy test. Cull open cows, bad feet, legs, udders, eyes, temperament, hard calvers and poor mothers.
- Use Body Condition Scores (BCS) to manage the herd. Year round feeding management should target a goal of moderate to good condition (BCS ≥ 2.5) at calving because cows will cycle and breed sooner than thin cows (BCS ≤ 2.0).
- Cows going into winter with BCS ≥ 3.0 can afford to lose 1/2 BCS or about 100 lbs.
- Thin cows need up to 30% more feed over winter than cows in moderate condition in order to gain enough weight to achieve BCS 2.5 at calving and up to 70% more feed than a cow carrying some backfat (BCS ≥ 3.0).

- Manage feed to reduce waste – feed on clean snow, use “tombstone” bale feeders, feed under a hot wire, use moveable bottomless bunks from drill stem or other pipe, use old mine conveyor belting to make portable feed troughs, grind and mix with more palatable roughages – whatever works!
- Treat cattle for external parasites (warbles and lice). Internal parasites may also be worth treating, on advice of a veterinarian.

Maximize Value of Feed Supply

- Ammoniation of straw and chaff improves dry matter and energy digestibility, crude protein content and rate of passage. Ammoniation can increase an animal’s voluntary intake of digestible energy from straw or chaff by as much as 50%. Ammoniated straw and chaff should still be feed tested and will still need supplementing with minerals, vitamins and possibly some grain, especially for thin cattle or young cattle.
- Supplement low quality roughages such as mature range grass, slough hay, stubble and straw or chaff piles or rows in the field, etc. They are too low in protein (and energy, minerals and vitamins) to support sufficient microbial growth in the rumen for optimal digestion. Supplementation with natural protein or NPN + grain will allow animals to get much more feed value out of the same feed – range pellets, lick tanks, molasses tubs or a home-mixed grain-protein-vitamin-mineral supplement
- Grinding coarse or poor quality feeds will increase feed value by increasing intake and reducing wastage. Mixing with moderate quality roughages will increase palatability and/or dilute anti-nutritive factors such as nitrates. Feed test the mixtures so exact nutritional information is available. Don’t grind too fine (3/4 or 1" screen max.) and don’t grind at all if cattle can get enough to eat without.

For more information:

- Western Forage Beef Group (Foragebeef.ca) – www.foragebeef.ca
- Western Beef Development Centre – www.wbdc.sk.ca
- PFRA Drought Watch – www.agr.gc.ca/pfra/drought
- Prairie Feed Resource Centre – www.feedresources.usask.ca
- SAFRR – www.agr.gov.sk.ca/Livestock.asp?firstPick=Livestock
- SAFRR Drought Watch – www.agr.gov.sk.ca/docs/about_us/programs_services/droughtwatch.asp
- AAFRD – www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/app21/rtw/index.jsp
- MAFRI Livestock – www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/livestock/index.html



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FACS represents the livestock industry in advancing responsible animal care and handling practices in agriculture.

Associate Memberships are available from \$50.00 – \$199.99 + GST.
 Active Memberships start at \$200.00 + GST
 Receipts are issued for all memberships.

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