

Visit Your Nutritionist Now or Your Veterinarian Later

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The celebration of a warm winter is very noticeable in the agricultural community. Although the tractors are not rolling yet, and shouldn't be, cattle are sometimes less confined and certainly more moveable.

As I was driving down the road this past week, I saw an occasional herd of cattle out wandering pastures. The cow's movement was probably more for exercise than any type of nutrition, but several cows were distinctly busy eating the dry forage still present on the previously grazed pastures.

These cattle were not grazing established winter pastures, but were milling around on pastures designed for summer grazing programs. A grass specialist would warn producers to make sure potential summer yields are not being impacted. A nutritionist would urge producers to make sure nutritional needs of the cow and unborn calf are not compromised.

Warm winters certainly make winter chores easy. The most common and positive impact is the saving of feed that would normally be rolled out in the form of forage or grain. The basic assumption during nice weather is that cows can get by on less because they do not need as much energy to get through the winter nights. This is a nice thought that most accountants would agree with.

A basic mistake that has been repeated over the years is the underfeeding of the cowherd and overgrazing of pastures during nice winters. A major challenge in warm winters is making sure the nutritional needs are met. The results of conservative feeding in warm winters can surface in the spring with undernourished cows and poor performing or dead calves.

A major adjustment needed for feeding cows in cold winters versus warm winters is the increase in feed needed to stay warm on cold nights. It is important to realize that the adjustment is an increase in feed for colder nights, not a decrease in feed for warmer nights. The cows still have a baseline nutritional requirement and all nutritional needs must be met.

The subtle but critical decrease in feed fed, or in some cases feed consumed by the cow, means all other

nutritional components of the rations are also decreased. A baseline listing of nutrition available in the feed and the nutritional needs of the cow and calf fetus should be the outcome of a balanced winter ration. If the ration was limited on a particular nutrient, feeding less of the ration (or a cow consuming less of the ration) means the nutrient deficiency occurs more rapidly.

Remember, the cow and her growing fetus need to meet her energy and protein needs. The cow also needs to receive all the major minerals consisting of calcium, phosphorous, potassium, sodium, sulfur and magnesium, as well the trace minerals of iron, zinc, copper, manganese, iodine, cobalt and selenium. In addition, interactions between these minerals can occur depending on the ranch location. Your nutritionist will provide a thorough review of the needs and situations than can arise.

If mineral concerns are not enough, the vitamins are also required for normal health. In the normal flow of most operations, over supply of feed is more the case than under supply. Primarily, producers realize there is a certain amount of waste and the expectation is not for the cow to eat everything.

In such delivery methods, the error is on the side of safety and generally the nutritional needs are easily met. Reversing the logic, and cutting feed to the edge is risky, especially when seat of the pants techniques are used to estimate nutrients.

It is important to visit with your nutritionist to ensure that feed intakes are adequate to meet nutritional requirements. You may save yourself a trip to the clinic.

May you find all your NAIS-approved ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0285.

Essential Vitamins and Minerals for Pregnant Beef Cows

Macro Minerals

Calcium, Phosphorous, Potassium, Sodium,
Sulfur and Magnesium

Trace Minerals

Iron, Zinc, Copper, Manganese, Iodine, Cobalt,
and Selenium

Vitamins

Vitamins A, D, E, (B and K Vitamins - seldom)