



# BeefTalk: Buy Feed by Value, Not Pounds

**A sound understanding of the nutritional requirements of cattle and the nutritional value of feed is needed.**

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Wintering cattle requires feed. The current tight inventories of feed suggest that cow culling should be deep.

Yet, once the culling is done, but the bales still don't add up, the time is right to contact a good beef cattle nutritionist. The nutritionist can help develop a "least cost" ration.

When developing the least-cost ration, feedstuffs may need to be purchased. One needs to be careful and review all options.

Through the years, most of us have witnessed the detrimental effects of underfeeding or the results of overfeeding. The important point is that the nutrient value of feed is what drives value and performance.

When I was fresh out of college, a producer preparing for calving was seeking a supplement to go along with his lower-quality grass hay. I asked if he had higher-quality hay that more likely would meet the requirements of a cow in late gestation or early lactation.

"No," the producer said.

"Don't you ever have any access to alfalfa hay?" I queried.

"Yes, but I fed that out when the cows came off pasture in October and November," the producer replied.

There were two red flags with this scenario. The first was the failure of the producer to understand the nutritional requirements of cattle at different stages of life. The second was the misallocation of current feed inventories.

A sound understanding of the nutritional requirements of cattle and the nutritional value of feed is needed. Chip Poland, Dickinson State University Department of Agriculture and Technical Studies chair and a well-educated beef cattle nutritionist, says the first step is to encourage producers to default back to the basics.

"We feed nutrients, not pounds, which is a tough concept to get across since we physically see pounds," Poland says. "Corn at \$6.35 per bushel (local price in Dickinson on Aug. 20) equates to approximately 14 cents per pound of total digestible nutrients (TDN). Hay at \$100 per ton to be delivered at approximately \$15 per bale (roughly a 150-mile delivery) is priced at roughly 13 cents per pound of TDN."

The form that one buys feed in is price dependent. Using Poland's example, with both corn and hay priced high, there still are options as to how a producer obtains the energy and other nutrients that a cow needs.

"Hay was still cheaper, but, in the long haul after waste is figured in, that may or may not be true," Poland says. "I can limit feed corn with minimal waste. While storing and feeding round bales of hay, one should factor in to the price approximately 10 percent waste."

Another factor that needs to be addressed is transportation.



"What would corn cost if we looked at the source and moved it in unit volumes?" Poland asks. "A local elevator published corn prices at \$4.60 and \$4.80 per bushel for old and new corn, respectively, in today's newspaper. Using the same hauling price for hay (approximately \$350 per load for a 60-mile trip), the per-bushel price increases about 45 cents to \$5.05 and \$5.25, respectively, or about 11 to 12 cents per pound of TDN from corn."

In a very simple scenario, we see high-priced corn may not be as high as it would appear. Conversely, hay may not be the only feed of choice at times.

This analogy, along with numerous other examples of shopping around for feeds stuffs, is required of producers this year if one is producing cattle in areas that are short of feed. Not only is the basic ingredient (feed) missing, all the costs have escalated greatly.

Producers need to make good, solid assumptions and keep in mind the answer will be different for each location and producer. However, producers need to price nutrients, not pounds of feed delivered and seek the help of a sound, well-educated beef cattle nutritionist.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>.

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

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