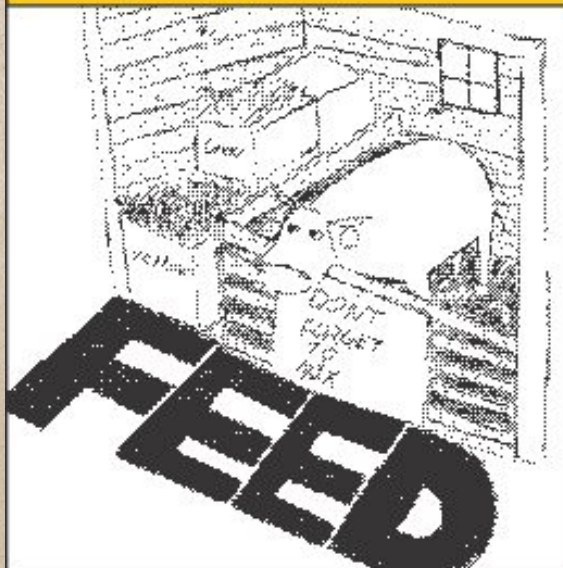




BeefTalk 741: Proper Cow Nutrition Now Saves Headaches Later

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

With proper nutrition, the herd will benefit and so will your pocketbook.



A cow is more likely to sustain a healthy state of living when the feed she consumes is a mixture of green and yellow feeds.

Cattle roundups have occurred at an elevated pace this past week. A cherished goal is extra days of grazing, but weather trumps almost everything. The many forgotten little things are the real driving forces determining when the cattle need to come home.

Granted, different cattle operations function with a wide range of managerial expectations, but regardless of how intensive or extensive an operation is, weather will trigger a change. Home may be the ranch headquarters or a parcel of land with natural protection from the elements.

Either way, the challenge often is how many days a producer can go with the expectation of still getting all the management operations finished before the weather changes. What does that mean? It means the weather changes everything.

Not all of the gates work when the weather turns cold, and not all the water sources are winterized. Actually, the gates and water might work, but the hands do not work nearly as well. Cold hands make for a long day.

In addition, those easy-to-get-to cattle-loading spots no longer are as easily accessible. What was a nice dirt, gravel-type road can turn into a nightmare overnight. What was a slightly sloped road with manageable ditches can turn into a regular slide with no buffer once the trailer wheels slip over the edge.

What was a nice trail available for cows, calves, horses and riders to get home leisurely can become a slick slide that is destined to take cows, calves, horses and riders down. Sure footing maintains confidence as cattle and horses move



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and helps keep the stock quiet, so it is a big deal staying ahead of the weather to utilize the vast resources of the so called "cattle ranch."

Perhaps the most challenging part of the weather change is the difference in attire for the cattle handlers. The free-moving jeans, shirt and boots become a flex-changing combination of layers of work clothes. The jacket and extra wind and cold protection become a bother when trying to move a cantankerous, unwilling calf. And climbing up and over a fence or simply getting out of the way when one is in the wrong spot at the wrong time can be intimidating.

However, the weather changes, and so does life. Many cattle operations have moved to the next step by having the calves weaned, so the cows are taking a rest.

This also is the time to evaluate the nutritional needs of the cow herd and how one meets those needs. Although it is true that feed must be edible, free of digestive problems and compatible with a beef cow, that still leaves a large selection of alternative feedstuffs. Regardless of what one is feeding, in very simplistic feeding terms, the world of the beef cow is somewhere between green and yellow.

If you were told to eat all your vegetables as a youngster, the reasoning for it was simple: Vegetables contain nutrients that are needed to sustain a healthy state of living. Likewise, a cow is more likely to sustain a healthy state of living when the feed she consumes is a mixture of green and yellow feeds.

Feeding all corn without greens is not good. Feeding all straw or grain byproducts with no greens is not good. Feeding all second-cutting alfalfa with no yellows is not good. Feeding all brown, overly mature grass hay with no green hay is not good.

A mixture of green grass and yellow corn could work. A mixture of older, yellow-looking hay with first-cutting alfalfa could work. A mixture of straw or grain byproducts with green leafy grass hay could work. In all cases, an appropriate supplementation of minerals and vitamins is recommended.

These are basic thoughts that need to be evaluated as one reviews seasonal changes in the management of the cow herd. In most cattle operations, the most expensive variable is feed.

I always remember a case where a producer struggled with lower-quality grass hay during calving because he had fed the higher-quality hay during the winter months. His thinking was that the cattle needed the extra nutrition in mid-gestation. The producer did not understand the various cattle nutritional requirements at different stages of life and when to feed the lower-quality versus the higher-quality feed.

Such misallocation of feed inventories can create production difficulties and unneeded headaches at calving and rebreeding. With the change in weather, now is a good time to see the local cattle nutritionist. Seek good information that is based on actual feed analysis results to make the needed weather adjustments and meet the needs of the cow.

The herd will benefit, and so will your pocketbook.

May you find all your ear tags.

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