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BeefTalk: Effective Cropping Systems Reduce Winter Feed Costs



Grazing forage systems keeps cows and calves grazing well into the winter months.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

Grazing of crop rotational systems that include cover crops and crop residue is a managerial change that can decrease beef production costs.

This change is further enhanced when calving time is shifted to when cool-season pasture grass is available, opening the doors to more extended grazing and less need for harvested forage. Implementation of these changes may take several seasons and, depending on location, several managerial options.

Images

Costs of Winter Feeding Per Cow	
Dickinson Research Extension Center	
Traditional hay and supplement feeding	\$208.81
Adding cover crop and crop residue prior to winter feeding	\$140.59
Adding stockpiled grass and corn residue prior to winter feeding	\$73.33

Sentirakli S. and D. Landblom, www.ag.ndsu.edu/dickinsonrec/2014-annual-report/livestock146.pdf

Costs of Winter Feeding Per Cow

columns

Spotlight on Economics: Spotlight on Economics: Flood Hazards Impact on House Prices in the Fargo-Moorhead Area (2016-10-13) Actual flood events can change a homebuyer's perceptions about flood risk, thereby possibly discounting the home's value. [FULL STORY](#)

BeefTalk: BeefTalk: Effective Cropping Systems Reduce Winter Feed Costs (2016-10-27) Grazing forage systems keeps cows and calves grazing well into the winter months. [FULL STORY](#)

Prairie Fare: Prairie Fare: Mix the Wild Side of the Menu With Some Greens (2016-10-27) Wild game is a good source of protein and is lower in fat and calories than some types of domesticated animal protein. [FULL STORY](#)

Small-business Savvy: Small-business Savvy: Define Your Small-business Audience (2016-10-20) Watching people and reading are great

However, the impact of lowering costs never will be realized if changes are not made. Keep in mind, cattle producers must choose a system that works for them. Change for change's sake is counterproductive, but change because increasing costs are causing a negative impact on the bottom line is certainly a discussable point.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center embraced the delayed calving season, turning bulls out Aug. 1. This allows cattle to graze longer because the third trimester does not start until mid-February, which means an opportunity to cut winter feed costs.

As the center changed, the opportunity to document the change was welcomed. Visiting scholar Songul Senturklu and center animal scientist Doug Landblom cut the cost of traditional confined forage feeding by 33 to 67 percent when incorporating late-season grazing of cover crops, winter grass and crop residue. Total winter feeding costs per cow were \$208.81 for traditional hay and supplement feeding, \$140.59 for adding cover crop and crop residue prior to winter feeding, and \$73.33 for adding stockpiled grass and corn residue.

So often, cattle production is trapped in historic production systems. Truthfully, current production methods are not historic. While the production of calves through cows has been around for several

ways to start. [FULL STORY](#)

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thousand years, those systems were small, sustainable and had a local reach. Cattle would have had to walk or be herded across many geographical barriers to be otherwise.

Until refrigeration, no sharing of meat occurred. Even today, the lack of refrigeration immediately suspends the movement of most products.

Today, most cattle production changes have occurred during the careers of those who currently work in the beef business. This is significant because the expectation that beef products can feed the world is a relatively new concept. The relationships and how hands are joined to make that process work are historically untested, as is the equitable exchange of value, an effort for all parties to share in fair market value.

To make things even more complicated, the many individuals involved in the various transactions want, or expect, a share in the value of the product. So how many participants can the cow pay?

Likewise, when producers ponder how they can better manage their operations and make management changes, significant pushback may occur because payout to participants down the beef chain may decrease. So current issues are not historic; rather, they're a product of insouciance, a nonchalant drifting through time, a passing of the torch further and further from the

one who births the calf to one who consumes the calf.

Some would say this is consumerism, producing, in this case, beef that fits the scope of those who consume. Most recently, the effort of meeting the consumer demands places tremendous pressure on producers to meet those demands, to conform. But as the beef business reaches out further and further to supply product, the product becomes more distant from the one who births the calf, the beef producer.

In comparison, the poultry and swine industries have encased themselves to genetically and managerially meet the world of specification meat. This has widened competition, exposing the beef industry to competitive weak spots.

But beeves are not intended, nor have evolved, to be a specificity meat product. Beeves evolved to be a very broad-based user of forage and other products that we, as humans, could not utilize. The integration of beef into the cycle of life, the carbon cycle and soil health, is critical to the sustainability of food production systems.

Beef, in many respects, is a product of cropping systems that are enhanced by the addition of cattle to the crop rotation to maintain healthy soil, although that statement sometimes is forgotten within agricultural gatherings. The value of working together is the key.

In closing, the center did move from grain and hay production to a forage base with an option for the forage to be grazed or put up as hay. With minimal grain production, expanded forages, longer grazing and later calving, the center has changed.

Grazing forage systems keeps cows and calves grazing well into the winter months, and beef production is good. Why? Well, cutting the cost of traditional late-fall and winter feeding by 33 to 67 percent helps.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact your local NDSU Extension Service agent (<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/directory>) or Ringwall at the Dickinson Research Extension Center, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601; 701-456-1103; or [✉kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu](mailto:kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu).

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Attachments



[PDF - Costs of Winter Feeding Per Cow](#)

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