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BeefTalk: Will the Hay Inventory Feed the Cows?



Provide the proper supplementation to meet the current needs of the cow herd or reduce inventory.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

Cow herd inventory is the working asset for beef producers, and maintaining that inventory is an important component of a successful beef operation.

A walk through the Dickinson Research Extension Center calf pens checks the health and vigor of the calves. The challenge is keeping feed resources current to provide the daily feed needs for the center.

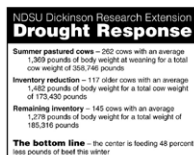
At the center, 229 calves are anticipated to consume 378 tons of forage before spring grass. At 1,300 pounds per bale, 582 bales of forage will be fed before turnout May 1. So I pondered: How much hay should the calves get before the call is made to sell some calves to spare forage for the cow herd?

The calves also receive 4 pounds daily of a commercial supplement to balance the forage-based ration and make for better utilization of the forage. And that saves 82 tons of hay (or 126 bales) for the cow herd.

What about the cows? The center summered 262 cows with an average fall weight of 1,369 pounds, or a total cow weight of 358,746 pounds. The average condition score was 6.3.

The drought cut into feed supplies, so the center sold 117 older cows totaling 173,430 pounds of beef, at an average weight of 1,482 pounds. That meant 145 younger cows were kept that averaged 1,278 pounds, or a total weight of 185,316 pounds.

Images



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Just for curiosity, the 3-year-old cows averaged 1,341 pounds, while the 2-year-old cows average 1,202 pounds. That extra year of life for the 3-year-old cow added 139 pounds to her body weight, or in terms of feed, almost half of a big round hay bale per cow for a typical winter.

I never have looked at drought reductions that way, but obviously, selling older cows removes more weight than selling the younger cows. So looking at the older cows the center did sell, the 117 older cows totaled 173,430 pounds of beef. The average weight for the older cows was more, thus selling older cows removed more total weight, which translates into feed savings.

Of the 117 cows sold, 75 were traditional-bred (standard size) cows that averaged 1,580 pounds, while the 42 Aberdeen-influenced cows (bred for reduced mature size) averaged 1,308 pounds. Another curiosity point: I found the 272-pound body weight difference interesting because the difference between the standard size and Aberdeen-influenced cows is almost an additional large round bale per cow for a typical winter.

Anyway, those cows are sold and off the inventory. A side note: The standard cow herd weaned an average of 470 pounds of May/June-born calves; the Aberdeen-influenced cow herd weaned an average of 432 pounds of May/June calves. I scratch my head as producers will ponder the size of their cows and come up with a number. Another side note: Producers need to keep cow size within the goals of the operation and actually weigh cows to aid in management decisions.

Back to the cows. The current center cow inventory is 83 standard beef cows (average weight 1,344 pounds) and 62 Aberdeen-influenced cows (average weight 1,190 pounds). The anticipated forage need is 2 to 2.5 percent of 185,316 pounds of body weight per day, or about 4,633 pounds of forage daily.

With the nice weather the area has received, the cows are grazing crop aftermath, with 4 pounds of 22 percent protein supplement cake fed every other day. If we start feeding after the first of the year for 120 days, the center needs 555,948 pounds of forage, or 278 tons; that's 428 of the 1,300-pound round bales. The center needs 1,010 bales to overwinter the cows and calves: 428 for the cows and 582 for the calves.

Yes, some give and take has been built into the percent of body weight consumed, as I figured high, but hay waste also occurs, and one does not want to come up short prior to calving.

The calf bale consumption is offset by 126 bales based on their daily supplement. The cows' bale consumption is offset by the cake supplement by 27 bales. Either way, no carryover of hay will happen. More than likely, some hay will need to be purchased.

Every day the cows stay on crop aftermath, the center benefits. Keep in mind, nice weather always is appreciated but can create illusions that things are fine.

Using crop aftermath and late-season dry forage can cut production costs; however, that can have consequences. Cows need to receive a balanced ration to halt poor performance or even the loss of condition.

A final reminder: The cows will enjoy the nice winter grazing; however, if the many extenuating circumstances affecting the cows' nutrition are not accounted for, the cows will not enjoy calving. Cows must maintain condition prior to calving, and those that lack condition need to add it and grow the developing calf.

So do not skimp, skimp and skimp in hopes of saving a few dollars. Rather, provide the proper supplementation to meet the current needs of the cow herd or reduce inventory.

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.

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Attachments



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