

Time for Fall Nutrition Tune-up

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Fall has officially started and the seasons are changing whether you are ready or not. Fall moisture has been more varied than our summer weather causing more disparity in the quantity of fescue that is stockpiled across the state. Late fall moisture and warm temperatures can still have a positive impact on forage growth. Rain or not, growing days and temperatures will be on a diminishing trend. As we begin to close out the growing year, it is an important time to assess management items which will impact cow herd nutrition and performance.

1. It is not too late to forage test your hay supply. Nutrition programs are based on forage quality. Without a forage analysis winter, supplement strategies are based on guesses and costs. Both underfeeding and overfeeding have costly impacts on your cow herd's performance and profitability. **Bottom line: one of the best ways to cut corners is to forage test and supplement only what is necessary.**
2. Assess the nutritional status of your herd today. The best snapshot barometer of nutritional status is to body condition score your cow herd. Fall calving cows should be at a condition score of 5-6 at calving. Spring calving cows will be thinner as calves are weaned this fall. Post-weaning is the most efficient time to add weight and condition to thin cows. First and second calf heifers are typically the ones requiring the most TLC. Some stockpiled forage or 2-3 lbs/hd/d of corn gluten feed are both effective and economical. **Bottom line: Objectively evaluate the condition of your cow herd to make strategic management and supplementation decisions.**
3. Stockpiled fescue will hold most of its nutrient content until next January – February. Strip grazing stockpiled forages has been demonstrated to increase efficiency of forage utilization. Restricting access to stockpiled forage will reduce selective grazing while still meeting cow nutrient needs. Allowing cows access to larger areas will allow cows to consume better quality forage than they need and trample residual forage. It may be more efficient to feed spring-calving, dry cows poor quality hay and allow greater stockpiled forage accumulation for later use. **Bottom line: Stockpiled forages are a valuable resource, use them wisely.**
4. At some point during the winter, supplemental feed is usually needed. Are you prepared to purchase and store it in an economical fashion? Have you done your shopping and preparation in advance? These items vary a great deal with size and scale of an operation. This could be pickup or tractor trailer load amounts. Storage options could be limited to bags for a small operation or a commodity shed or bin for a large one. The questions for all situations: “are you supplementing what you need” and “are you buying it as cheaply as possible”. Unfortunately, you need to have a handle on point (1) above to answer the first question. The second question really relates to the protein or energy needs and pricing your options based on a pound on TDN or crude protein. The other item that holds true for feeding cows is similar to feeding the family, *you pay for convenience*. There are many supplement options and choices available, substituting labor for convenience is one way to potentially reduce costs. **Bottom line: When supplementing, do so wisely and economically.**

As we look ahead into late fall and winter, these considerations now can save time and money later.