

Low on Forage? Consider Concentrates.



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It's hard to believe that winter is here. I don't know if it's because I'm getting older or because I have two boys to chase around, but the months seem to go by faster than before. One day the new baby calves are playing on green, fresh grass and then the next they're weaned and it's time to send the cows to the stalks or another winter-management location.

This summer's drought and the shortage of hay has left some producers considering winter drylot feeding. I recently found a Kansas State University Extension research publication with some tips on high-concentrate feeding that I thought was worth sharing.

According to the publication, decreasing the forage component of a cow's diet makes bunk and feeding management more detailed. A cow needs .5-.75% of its body weight in forage daily. That means most cows will need 5-7.5 lb. of dry hay or 30-45 lb. of silage daily.

Producers should provide sufficient bunk space — 2.5-3 feet per animal. It's important to make sure the diet is properly mixed and delivered evenly in the bunk. This will help provide access to all cows and keep the boss cows from overeating.

Cows have large appetites and are used to filling them. With a high-concentrate diet cows tend to become obese unless their appetites are curbed and their diets limited.

When feeding high-concentrate diets, producers need to increase management and closely monitor the cows. It's important to watch for problems such as rumen acidosis, bloat and founder. Rumen acidosis is a decrease in rumen pH causing diarrhea and decreased feed intake. Bloat is a swelling of the rumen that occurs when feed fermentation creates a foamy layer at the top of the rumen, which traps gasses. Founder is an increase in rumen acid production and a decrease in pH.

It's also important to monitor cold stress, pen conditions, herd health and changes in nutrient requirements from mid- to late-gestation to lactation. Remember that cold stress increases energy demands and an increase in mud affects both maintenance energy requirements and feed intake.

Don't forget to add trace minerals and vitamin A to the feed ration. These nutrients are not expensive and have long-term benefits. One option producers have to improve feed efficiency is to feed an ionophore. Research has shown that feeding ionophores improves feed efficiency by 8-10%. An ionophore is a type of antibiotic that depresses or inhibits the growth of specific rumen microorganisms. It generally decreases feed intake, improves feed conversion, maintains or increases daily

gain, and does not affect carcass characteristics. Rumensin® is currently the only ionophore cleared to feed beef cows.

The Extension publication noted high-concentrate diets are nontraditional and usually fed for economic reasons. Producers need to balance these diets for cow nutrient requirements — protein, energy, vitamins, minerals and roughage levels — and for least-cost value.

Holiday wishes

One of the busiest times of the year is the holidays. The crops are out of the fields, hay is up and most cows are done calving, but there's a flurry of activity with family and friends.

I've found this time of year is especially fun with children. The sparkle in their eyes and the excitement in their voices make the holiday season such a joy. Their excitement tends to rub off on those around them. I look forward to the special music programs and church and school activities. But most of all I look forward to spending time with family.

I hope each of you take the time to cherish every moment with your family and friends this holiday season. And for those with loved ones overseas, your family members are in our prayers and we thank them for all they do.

Happy Holidays and God Bless,