

Feed those cows the right amount of feed

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A common mistake that is made as the weather warms is to reduce the feed a little bit. With a temporary letup from the harshness of winter weather, cow-calf producers breathe a sigh of relief. The arctic cold is held at bay and the world seems to go a little better. However, the cows still need to be fed. In fact, a common mistake that is made as the weather warms is to reduce the feed a little bit. In reality, yes, that extra feed for body heat may not be needed, but every day that a cow gets closer to birth, the more demanding the pregnancy becomes.

The calf is gaining weight and putting extra demands on the cow regardless of the weather. In fact, I doubt that the calf even knows how cold the outside world is, at least not until that moment of exposure at birth. Nevertheless, the cows need to be fed. Some producers prefer to calve early and some late, but most pick spring to calve and keep their fingers crossed with the hope that Mother Nature sends good sunshine and rain instead of heartbreaking storms.

As we all know, there is a cattle management system for every producer and the producer needs to be comfortable with whatever system is utilized. It really does not make any difference as to what management system the producer has developed. What is more important is that the ration or feeding plan is developed correctly. There are some critical facts that must be taken into consideration.

For example, How big are the cows? Some calculations that help show the amount of feed that a cow would need at a given environment (5 degrees F and no mud), a given milk production (17.6 pounds of peak milk during lactation), a given stage of production (cow in the last two-thirds of pregnancy) and given feed resource (55 percent total digestible nutrients forage). The 1,000-pound cow required 26.5 pounds of dry matter per day, while the 2,000-pound cow required 42.2 pounds of dry matter per day.

Obviously, the larger cow needs not only a fork or two more hay, but it needs 15.7 pounds more dry matter than the smaller cow. This is not good or bad. It simply is a biological need. Likewise, the smaller cow will waste the feed that is provided in addition to what she needs, so know your cows and how much they need to eat.

If we use these calculations and assumptions, here are the other daily dry matter needs for different weight cows:

1,100-pound cow needs 28.2 pounds of dry matter

1,200-pound cow needs 29.9 pounds of dry matter

1,300-pound cow needs 31.5 pounds of dry matter

1,400-pound cow needs 33.1 pounds of dry matter

1,500-pound cow needs 34.7 pounds of dry matter

1,600-pound cow needs 36.2 pounds of dry matter

1,700-pound cow needs 37.8 pounds of dry matter

Again, this is simply an example to illustrate how the amount of feed a cow needs varies considerably by body weight. Other factors also influence the amount of dry-matter forage a cow needs to consume daily.

Now is not the time to misjudge cow nutrition. When you visit with the nutritionist, make sure you adjust the cow feeding for your environment, cow size, expected milk production and cows at calving time. Have a good feed analysis in hand and be able to describe your feeding system so appropriate feed wastage can be factored in.