

Expert Nutrition



Build a nutritional management plan for good times and bad.

by Morgan Boecker & Lindsay Graber Runft, Certified Angus Beef

A cowboy hat is just one of the hats cattlemen wear. They're also mechanics, accountants, conservationists, veterinarians, plumbers and nutritionists. An area requiring increased attention — especially during drought and high feed costs — is nutrition.

Today's cow herd is the most

efficient it's ever been. But that doesn't mean you can slack off in basic energy requirements when times get tough.

"It's easy to just walk out there and say, 'What can I cut?' In this environment, with the kind of production that we demand from these cattle and the money we spend on genetics, I think that's a grave

mistake," says Dusty Abney, beef cattle nutritionist for Cargill Animal Nutrition.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to be sure you're making the best decisions for your environment. But getting back to the basics of cattle management will assist you in doing more with less.



[PHOTOS COURTESY OF CERTIFIED ANGUS BEEF]

Your cows' nutritional needs are likely different from those of your neighbors' cows. Make sure you meet your herd's nutrient requirements to maximize function and performance.

Find the right people

"There are some producers out there who are really good at nutrition, there are some folks that need a lot of help, and there are people in between," Abney says. "You've got to realize which you are and be honest with yourself, and go ask for help when you need it."

Trew James, Lazy J Bar Cattle Co. of Dalhart, Texas, understood the kind of diet his commercial Angus cows and grow yard needed. He had worked with nutrition consultants in the past, but when he started seeing a lack in performance in his calves, he sought Abney for guidance.

"He saved my whole business through this drought," James says. "The cattle just look good. Their hair is shiny, and they're growing more but eating less."

Together they built a limit-feeding program so extra feed isn't being wasted while drought conditions make resources scarce. Now, James can feed less roughage with the right amount of minerals for his cow herd and calves on feed and still see significant gains. He sees fewer open cows after breeding. Weaned calves are healthier and heavier and go on to gain half a pound more than normal with no extra feed, he adds.

"I save money on feed rations, but invest in minerals," James says. "Because the

calves grow better, I make more money."

It starts by asking for help. Ask until you find the right partner. James suggests inquiring if feed suppliers have consultants on staff. Other resources may include state extension agents or independent nutrition consultants who understand your current climate. There are a lot of things you can learn from industry publications and educational events, but the most important thing is to find someone who knows your environment and what you're up against.

"It's an investment in the future of your operation," Abney says. "If you make wasteful decisions and those decisions come back to haunt you, it's not going to be in a time when prices are good."

Plan for good and bad

When managing your resources is complicated by conditions outside of your control, sharper management

can still help find the rewards in ranching. By managing what can be managed and considering potential outcomes (good or bad), you can target positive results.

"We have to make sure that we're not giving in to analysis paralysis, where we just wait for something else to happen," Abney says. "Not making a decision is still a decision."

Take a harder look at things you can control, such as feed waste. Abney says well-managed operations can suffer from 5%-10% feed waste daily, depending on the type of ingredient and how it is fed, such as delivery and feeder type.

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loss for open rings, 13.6% loss for those with a bottom sheet and 8.9% loss for cone designs.

Correct hay storage helps reduce waste, too, Abney says. Ensiled forages are susceptible to loss from poor fermentation or exposure to air after fermentation.

Essential nutrients

"Doing what you have to" in times of high operating costs makes sense, Abney says. Fetal-programming means nutritional decisions on bred females affect a cow herd in the short and long term.

"If you short her, she will short you," Abney cautions. "A cow never gets a day off, and what we provide that animal from a supplementary basis and from our forage base affects her and her calf."

What and how you feed a cow matters. Consider ingredient sourcing, infrastructure and the balance of nutrients against requirements. Then

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look at the feeding process: quantity, time and method for feeding. Nutritionists can provide key advice on the “what” and “how” to achieve targeted gains, improved herd health and overall profitability.

Looking to a drought scenario specifically, Abney notes, the first step is understanding what’s available for cows to consume. To keep ruminants operational, cows need more than 1% roughage on a dry-matter basis. Supplement that with energy, such as corn, distillers’ grains or whole cottonseed, based on nutritional requirements.

High-quality beef production requires mineral supplementation. But through a drought, that supplement can vary greatly. Forage test results and other feed evaluations can show where to adjust mineral inputs for a better bottom line.

“Working with Dusty helped me understand that cows don’t need a lot extra,” James says. “The right combination of roughage and mineral

Digital EXTRAs



Dusty Abney discusses economic solutions for the cattle business.

will let them do more with less. And when it starts raining again, I’ll definitely talk to him about the best mineral package.”

Nutrition and feed resource management, along with all profit areas of an operation, deserve time and careful attention throughout the cattle market cycle. Without a proactive plan in place, greater effects could be felt for years to come. **ABB**

Editor’s note: This story was adapted from a news release covering Abney’s Cattlemen’s College® session during the 2023 Cattle Industry Convention.

Maximize genetics

From a bull purchased during this bull sale season to calves born and heifers retained this year, the nutrition plan for those animals determines if they’ll perform as anticipated.

“If you invest in genetics and don’t invest in your nutritional program, your animals will never express their full genetic potential,” Abney says.

Even with increasing prices at the meatcase, consumers continue to purchase high-quality beef. That’s why Abney cautions against decreasing the bull budget. Investments in superior genetics could still pay.

When buying bulls, added carcass value helps increase your calf crop’s *Certified Angus Beef*®

(CAB®) brand acceptance rate, proven to add premiums. To assist in selection, Angus bull buyers can look for the *Targeting the Brand*™ logo in sale books to find animals with a minimum expected progeny difference (EPD) for marbling of +0.65 and a Grid Value Index (\$G) of +55 or higher.

Targeting the Brand translates to Angus feeder calves enrolled in the AngusLinkSM Genetic Merit Scorecard®. Groups of enrolled calves that are predominantly black and have a 125 Grid Score or higher are eligible to use the logo, too.



Minimum Genetic Requirements

	Value
Marbling EPD (Marb)	+0.65
Dollar Grid Carcass Index (\$G)	+55.0

Sire-identified carcass data from more than 8,600 records in the American Angus Association database show those EPD values are minimum thresholds to achieve an average of 50% CAB acceptance.