

Beef Talk

Feed the cows, and feed them right

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Winters like this year create discussion about what type of cattle operation is best. Despite the discussion, the fact remains that the cows need to be fed.

Calving-time discussions are relevant, as are discussions on high- vs. low-input cows and big vs. small cows. The bottom

line is that producers must select a cattle management system they are comfortable with. What is even more important is that, in every system, producers still must feed the cows.

If more time were spent discussing the nutrient requirements of beef instead of

the merits of different systems, all the cows would be better off.

Nutrition involves four basic needs. How much do the cows weigh and milk? How is the environment affecting the feeding requirements of the cattle? What stage of production are the cattle in? Lastly, what type of feed do you have available?

The answers to these four questions have nothing to do with the management system the producer has developed. The important part is that the producer can answer the questions factually so the nutritionist can correctly calculate a feeding plan.

The nutritionist will take into consideration the cows, environment, stage of production, feeds available and the nutritional analysis of those feeds when the ration is formulated. Getting the correct answer is critical.

First things first

Let's take the very first question about how big the cows are. Greg Lardy, North Dakota State University beef cattle specialist and nutritionist, shared some calculations that help show the amount of feed that a cow would need in a given environment (5° F temperature and no mud), a given milk production [17.6 pounds (lb.) peak milk production during lactation] a given stage of production (a cow in the last two-thirds of pregnancy) and a given feed resource [55% total digestible nutrient (TDN) forage].

Lardy calculated the dry-matter (DM) intake for every 100 lb. of cows weighing from 1,000 to 2,000 lb. The 1,000-lb. cow requires 26.5 lb. of

Table 1: Beef cattle nutrient requirements^a

Cow weight (lb.)	Estimated DM intake (lb./day)
1,000	26.5
1,100	28.2
1,200	29.9
1,300	31.5
1,400	33.1
1,500	34.7
1,600	36.2
1,700	37.8
1,800	39.3
1,900	40.7
2,000	42.2

^a Assuming dry matter feed required at 5° F temperature, no mud, 17.6 lb. peak milk during lactation, last two-thirds of pregnancy and 55% TDN forage.

Source: Greg Lardy, North Dakota State University beef cattle specialist and nutritionist. Based on the 1996 NRC Beef Cattle Nutrient Requirements Table Generator.

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DM per day, while the 2,000-lb. cow requires 42.2 lb. of DM per day.

The larger cow needs a lot more than a fork or two more of hay. She actually needs 15.7 lb. more DM. It's simply a biological need, which is not good or bad.

Likewise, the smaller cow will waste feed that is provided over what she actually needs, so know your cows and how much they need to eat.

If we accept Lardy's assumptions, the 1,000-lb. cow needs 26.5 lb. of DM forage (see Table 1). The daily DM needs for cows of different weights are shown in the table and illustrate how the amount of feed a cow needs varies considerably by body weight (see Table 1). Other factors also influence the amount of forage DM a cow needs to consume.

Nutrition is key

Now is not the time to misjudge cow nutrition. When you get to 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 also can be factored in. Now is not the time to debate cattle management systems. Instead, feed your cows enough and feed them right.

Your comments are always welcome at www.beefstalk.com.

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to www.chaps2000.com.



Editor's Note: *Addressing the past, present and future state of the beef cattle business, "Beef Talk" is a weekly column distributed by the North Dakota State University (NDSU) Agricultural Communication office. Ringwall is executive secretary of the NDBCIA, director of the Dickinson Research Extension Center and an NDSU Extension beef specialist. An archive of columns can be found at www.beefstalk.com, and your comments are always welcome.*