

Well, this has been quite a winter and spring for many of you across the northern plains! With record snowfall and flooding concerns across the region, many cattle producers have faced serious issues in cow herd management resulting from the severe winter and this spring's wet conditions

As I've traveled the state this winter and spring, I have been amazed at the amount of snowfall across the area. Now, I'm amazed at the amount of water flowing in areas which have never seen water.

In this month's issue, I've tried to pull together some material you might find useful as you recover from the impacts of the weather. Let's hope and pray for some weather which will allow us to get back to normal quickly!

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Bad Weather Brings Scours

Adapted from Charlie Stoltenow, NDSU Veterinarian, Department of Animal Sciences, with Ellen Crawford, NDSU Ag Communications

This spring's snow, rain, and floods have severely hampered the ability of calves to survive.

These weather conditions have been a real setback for our 2009 calf crop. We can expect to see an increase in scours (diarrhea) and pneumonia in young calves and dystocia (difficult births) in cows and heifers.

Feed supplies are limited, so the pregnant dam may not be receiving adequate nutrition, which causes a decrease in colostrum quantity and quality, and also leads to dystocia because the female doesn't have enough energy to go through parturition. Also, the calving areas are muddy and crowded and become easily contaminated with pathogens such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites.

Complicating this situation, producers' attention is diverted from managing the cattle to just surviving another day of trying to find feed, getting the feed to their cattle, removing snow and mud, and taking care of family needs.

The weather conditions are beyond our control, but we have to try to control the environment as much as possible to give calves the best possible chance for survival.

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Pregnant females require a ration balanced for energy, protein, minerals, and vitamins. Producers should make a special effort to ensure these cattle get enough energy.

Producers may need to consider other feedstuffs, such as grain, to augment or replace hay supplies. Poor-quality feedstuffs are also low in vitamin A. Vitamin A deficiency increases the number of weak or stillborn calves and the number of cases of scours. Producers should contact their veterinarian or nutritionist if they need some assistance in evaluating their feeding program.

The newborn calf needs a place that is as dry and clean as possible to reduce the incidence and severity of scours. Snow should be moved off frozen ground to provide a place for cattle to lie down. Clean bedding should be provided to help keep calves dry and warm.

Once scours starts and a calving area has become contaminated, nothing can be done to clean the environment or stop transmission of the pathogens. If this happens, producers need to consider moving the pregnant females that have not calved to another site to continue with calving.

In addition, producers should be vigilant for rapidly rising water in drainage areas. Overland flooding and more flooding of creeks, streams, and rivers can be expected.

The calf also must receive sufficient colostrum from its dam. At a minimum, the calf should receive 1 quart by 30 minutes of age and 2 quarts by 12 hours of age. The number one cause of calves becoming ill is directly related to not receiving enough colostrum in the first 12 hours of life. Also, because of the poor quality of forages this year, providing each calf with 500,000 international units of vitamin A might be a good idea. Producers should consult with their veterinarian about providing Vitamin A.

Vaccination of the dam can be beneficial, but it may be too late for this calving season. Pregnant females should be vaccinated about 30 days prior to calving so the colostrum the female produces will have the correct and sufficient immunoglobulins available for the calf when it first nurses. Vaccines also are available for the calves. Producers are encouraged to consult with their veterinarian to see if these vaccines might be appropriate for their operation. Treatment of scours should be directed toward alleviating dehydration, acidosis, and electrolyte loss. Oral fluids used early in the scouring process have been quite successful. Most dehydrated calves also suffer from hypothermia. Providing an external source of heat during fluid/electrolyte treatment often is necessary.

Antibiotics can be very beneficial when used in conjunction with fluid therapy. The most effective antibiotics for treating scours are prescription medications. Producers need to consult their veterinarian about using the most appropriate antibiotic for their operation.

Calf scours is a preventable and treatable condition. However, if the non-infectious causes of calf scours are ignored or receive inadequate attention, the subsequent infectious causes of calf scours can and will cause serious hardship for the calf and, subsequently, the producer.

More information is available at http://www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu/ in Extension publications AS-776, "Calf Scours," and AS-1207, "Preparing For a Successful Calving Season."

Substitute Grain or Coproducts for Hay in Beef Cow Rations

Greg Lardy, NDSU Extension Beef Cattle Specialist, Department of Animal Sciences, with Ellen Crawford, NDSU Agriculture Communications

The latest in a series of snow storms has many cattle producers scrambling to shore up hay and other feed supplies.

Producers already struggling due to the winter's extreme cold and heavy snow are now faced with shortages in key roughages as they go through calving and await spring weather.

The cold and snowy weather meant many cows consumed 30 percent to 40 percent more hay than normal to maintain body weight during the cold weather. This resulted in smaller-than-normal hay supplies as calving approached.



Reports indicate hay supplies are tight in many areas of the state. However, you can provide other feedstuffs in an effort to stretch short hay supplies.

Producers can use feed grains, such as corn or barley, or byproducts, such as distillers grains, wheat

middlings, corn gluten feed, sugar beet pulp or barley malt sprouts, to stretch feed supplies.

Research shows that, depending on feeding method, relatively high levels of these products can be used to replace forage in the diet and stretch tight hay supplies.

Feeding cattle rations with limited forage and increased levels of grain is one option. However, the strategy of limit feeding higher-concentrate diets requires careful ration management to execute successfully. In addition, when cows are limit fed high-grain or coproduct rations, they will feel hungry, even when their nutrient needs are met. Consequently, tight fences will be required to keep the cows in their pen or pasture if this strategy is implemented.

Cereal grains should be coarsely ground and fed on a daily basis to reduce the risk of digestive upsets and metabolic disorders. Producers also should be sure to balance minerals such as calcium and phosphorus, as well as providing adequate vitamin A when feeding alternative feedstuffs.

Even in situations where grain is not limit fed but higher levels are used, the potential to reduce forage digestibility and predispose cows to metabolic disorders such as acidosis is a concern, so producers need to be cautious when utilizing grain or byproducts in cow diets. Producers should be sure to meet the protein requirements of their cattle when feeding high levels of grain because the potential negative effects of starch on fiber digestion are greater when protein requirements are not met.

For more information on stretching hay supplies, as well as other advice on dealing with the effects of severe winter weather, visit the NDSU Extension's Website at:

http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/disaster/winterstorm.html.

Market Advisor: Cattle Herd Continues to Shrink

Adapted from Tim Petry, NDSU Livestock Marketing Economist, with Rich Mattern, NDSU Agriculture Communications

The USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) January 1 cattle inventory report released on January 30 shows a continued decline in U.S. cattle inventory.

The fact that the cattle herd declined was not a surprise to the cattle industry, but NASS also revised downward its previous estimates for January 1, 2008.

A revision statement said that all inventory and calf crop estimates for January 1, 2008, were reviewed using the calf crop, official slaughter numbers, import and export data, 2007 Census of Agriculture data, and the relationship of new survey information to prior surveys.

Based on the findings of this review, adjustments were made to the previous inventory estimates. Revisions to estimates were made at the national and state level and will be republished in a "Cattle, Final Estimates 2004-2008" publication scheduled for release on March 5.

All cattle and calves on January 1 totaled 94.5 million head, a 1.6 percent decline from last year's revised figure of 96 million. The previously reported inventory for 2008 was 96.7 million head. Therefore, the numbers are down almost 2.2 million.

Other selected revisions for 2008 include beef cows down 118,000 head, dairy cows up 33,000, beef replacement heifers down 23,000, and the 2007 calf crop revised downward by 602,000 head. Cow-calf producers continued a second year of beef cow liquidation that started in 2007.

Both beef cows that have calved and beef heifers for replacement declined more than 2 percent from the previous year. Drought in important cattle-producing regions in the U.S. and rising feed costs in 2007 likely caused the cow liquidation to start. In 2008, a continued increase in production costs, along with sharply declining cattle prices in the last half of the year, fueled the continued liquidation.

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Beef cows for slaughter were up 13 percent in 2008. No expansion in beef cow numbers is expected in 2009 because of the lower number of replacement heifers that will be retained and lower cattle prices due to the economic crisis.

Dairy cow numbers were up almost 1 percent at 9.3 million head. The increase was prompted by favorable milk prices in 2007 and the first half of 2008. However, milk prices at the farm level have crashed, so liquidations likely will occur in 2009.

The 2008 calf crop was down 646,000 and reported by NASS at 36.1 million head. In spite of that, the combined total of feeder cattle outside of feedlots was up 1 percent at 27.5 million head. Fewer calves were marketed in the fourth quarter of 2008 due to very low prices and ample forage in some regions.

Therefore, there may be more feeder cattle marketed in the first part of 2009 than in 2008.

Cattle on feed for slaughter numbers reflected lower calf marketing because there were only 13.9 million head on feed on January 1, compared with 14.8 million the previous year, a decline of almost 7 percent.

Generally, North Dakota numbers followed the national trend with all cattle down more than 3 percent and beef cows down more than 4 percent on January 1.

Dry weather in the western part of the state certainly was a contributing factor in the decline.

However, heifers kept for beef cow replacement in the state bucked the national trend because it was reported to be up 9 percent. The extremely low prices for heifers last fall probably caused producers to keep more heifers. Some of these heifers may not enter the cow herd. Instead, these heifers may be marketed as feeders before they are bred.

Usually, a decline in U.S. numbers, coupled with a downward revision in the previous year's inventory, would be very supportive to prices and eventually it will be.

However, current prices are being impacted negatively by the economic meltdown and struggling beef demand in the domestic and export markets.

How long this recession lasts domestically and internationally is anyone's guess, but a recovery is the key to higher cattle prices. The new administration and Congress are addressing the situation, but a recovery likely will be a slow process.

Assuming modest recovery occurs later in year and with the lower cattle numbers, 2010 should see better cattle prices, with 2011 and later looking even better!



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