

WINTER SUPPLEMENTATION OF THE COWHERD

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About this time of year I get a lot of questions about supplementing the cowherd. My response is based on the status of the cowherd and forage conditions. Dry pregnant cows in mid gestation have the lowest nutritional needs. Depending on the amount and quality of the grass, a protein supplement may be all that is needed. Cows that have calves at side will require additional protein and energy, adding to the cost of supplementation. One other factor I consider is cow fatness or body condition. Cows that are in good body condition will require less supplementation than cows that are thin.

If you test your hay or forage you might find that it is the only supplement you need, that it meets the nutritional requirements of your cows. More likely than not however, it will be deficient. However at least you will know what you need to supplement with, and more importantly how much. Feed costs are a large part of cow expenses and knowing what is needed and how much to feed can reduce that cost considerably. In addition to feeding the right amount of supplement and saving money you improve the performance of the cow's fertility and milk production and her calf's growth.

You will have to supplement more energy when it is cold and wet than when it is just cold but dry. The amount of standing forage you have due to stockpiling or grazing will also affect your feed costs. Protein supplementation when deficient can improve the digestibility of poor quality roughages significantly.

Form of supplementation is less important than cost per unit of nutrient. When supplementing protein (but not energy), the amount can be doubled or tripled and fed every other or every third day reducing travel and labor. Whenever possible feed should be placed in bunks or troughs to minimize waste and reduce cost.

Once you know what and how much you need, consider labor and travel in your costs. For more information on hay and forage testing or supplementation, contact your local County Extension Agent.

-30-

Suggested additional reading (all at beef.tamu.edu)

<http://animalscience.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2012/04/nutrition-body-condition-nutrition.pdf>

<http://animalscience.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2012/04/beef-factors-and-feed.pdf>

For more information please contact your local County Extension Agent: Roy Flora @ 936-334-3230.