

How Much Hay Will A Cow Eat In A Day?



DR. JAMES B. NEEL

KNOXVILLE, TENN.

How much hay will a cow eat in a day? This is a question that is asked or pondered by cow-calf producers during the winter or when planning their winter feed needs. Generally, the response is about 25-30 pounds per day, but it varies depend-

ing on characteristics of the cattle, the environment and the quality of the hay.

One item to consider is the stage of produc-

tion of the cows. Generally, beef cattle will consume approximately 2.5 percent of their body weight in dry matter per day of good quality hay. For example, a 1,000 pound, mature dry cow being allowed hay free choice will consume about 1.8 to 2.0 percent or 18 to 20 pounds per day. With poor quality hay, she will only be able to eat about 1.4 percent to 1.6 percent or 14 to 16 pounds. The table below illustrates the variation due to characteristics of the cows and quality of hay on hay intake. Δ

DR. JAMES B. NEEL: Professor/Extension Beef Cattle Specialist, University of Tennessee

Hay Intake Per Day of Beef Cows as Percent of Body Weight			
	Poor Quality	Good Quality	Excellent Quality
Dry, Mature Cow	1.4-1.6%	1.8-2.0%	2.3-2.6%
Mature Lactating Cow	1.6-1.8%	2.0-2.4%	2.6-3.0%