

Paying Too Much At The Trough?

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

Paying too much at the pump has transitioned into paying too much at the feed trough. "Like fuel, some feedstuffs today are twice as expensive compared to a few years ago," says Dr. Shane Gadberry, assistant professor-livestock specialist with the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service. Because of this, he says, producers should shop for the most economical sources of protein and energy this winter.

Routine hay analysis at the U of A Diagnostic lab suggests that hay is rarely deficient in protein for pregnant cows, but 40 percent of the hays are inadequate for lactating, or milk-producing, beef cows, Gadberry said. Low-intake protein supplements, such as protein blocks and lick tanks, provide unnecessary protein when fed to gestating cows.

While these products are effective at providing supplemental protein, limitations on intake often results in lactating beef cattle remaining energy deficient when wintered on a hay based diet.

"The average hay won't provide enough energy for milk-producing beef cows this winter" Gadberry said. "To compensate for this energy deficit, these cows should either be allowed to graze winter annual pasture at least two days a week or provided calories in the form of grain or

byproduct feed."

To avoid under- or over-feeding store-purchased grain or byproducts, feeding rates should be based on a forage analysis.

A routine forage test provides enough detail to determine if the protein and energy content of the hay TDN, or total digestible nutrients, are adequate, according to Gadberry. If a deficiency occurs, knowledge of forage quality can then be used to determine how many pounds of supplemental feed are required.

"Feedstuffs today vary in price as much as they do in nutrient content," Gadberry said. "In some instances, price may be more of a reflection of supply versus demand than a reflection of food value."

As a result, knowing what nutrients are deficient and the amount of deficiency can help determine the most economical option for maintain cow body condition and reproductive performance, he said.

He used an example of a milk-producing beef cow fed a 12 percent protein and 56 percent TDN hay.

"To overcome the energy shortfall of the hay," Gadberry said, "the cow would need to consume five pounds of corn gluten feed or eight pounds of rice bran a day. If corn gluten feed cost \$143 a ton delivered, rice bran would need to cost no more than \$89 a ton delivered." Δ