

Poor Pastures Give Producers Opportunity To Review Winter Feeding Options

COLUMBIA, MO.

Feeding hay will come sooner than normal for some cattle farmers this fall. The hot, dry conditions across much of cattle country this summer left cattle with thin pastures and not much to chew this fall.

While not opportune, these conditions give farmers a chance to look at their cattle herds with a critical eye and evaluate their feeding options.

"It's an excellent time to take inventory of your feed supply and think about culling your herd," said Rob Kallenbach, University of Missouri Extension forage specialist.

Culling makes sense when faced with feed supply issues. Cows with a history of calving problems, poor teeth or those that remain open can be sold to save hay and money.

Culled cattle can garner a pretty penny now at the sale barn thanks to prices holding steady.

"Often when we have to sell out of a drought we're also looking at depressed animal prices, but cull cow prices are really good right now despite all the hardships," Kallenbach said. "For better culled cows, prices are 70 cents per pound. That's a pretty good price for a 1,300-pound animal."

Once a herd is streamlined, cattle producers should evaluate whether they have enough hay to make it through the winter.

If hay reserves run low, farmers can supplement it with other feed sources such as distillers grain and corn gluten feed. Some will dip

into lower-quality hay to meet their needs. Kallenbach said ammonification of lower-quality forages gets more use when farmers are trying to stretch hay supplies for cows in good body condition.

"You can take some pretty poor fescue hay or other feedstuffs, cover the stack in plastic and add 60 pounds of anhydrous ammonia per ton to bump up the nonprotein nitrogen in the feed and make it more digestible or usable by the animal," he said.

Other strategies to stretch that hay crop a little further include limiting the amount of time that cows have access to hay racks.

"Most producers give their cows 24-hour access to hay, but they can limit that to an eight hour access period," Kallenbach said. "The herd will eat 90 percent of what they'd eat otherwise, but you stretch out the hay supply 10 percent. While that might not sound like a lot, it can get you a little further through the winter."

Kallenbach said it remains important to test your forage for quality.

Hay baled during drought-like conditions can contain high nitrate levels that can poison cattle. Knowing the nutrient levels cattle will get from your hay crop helps you make the right feeding decisions.

For those who recognize that they just don't have enough bales to make it through the winter, the Missouri Department of Agriculture has a hay directory at www.mda.mo.gov/abd/hay-directory. △



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