

Provide Good Feeding Management Necessary, Even During Tough Times

SPRINGFIELD, MO.

Even though cattle prices have plummeted, producers need to continue best feeding management practices to assure acceptable performance of their investment.

Eldon Cole, a livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension, says 550-pound steer calves were selling for about \$115 per hundredweight in the early fall and are now selling around \$90 per cwt.

“That drop amounts to around \$140 per head, which really hurts the bottom line,” said Cole.

During winter, cattle producers must watch their input costs, but Cole says to keep in mind that some feed inputs are vital to acceptable performance in a herd.

“Priorities must be developed and decisions made regarding what must be done and what is considered a luxury. I know what’s routine on one farm may be viewed as unnecessary on another,” said Cole.

Cole offers the following feeding practices as examples of things to consider during the New Year.

1) Feed adequately, but economically by knowing body condition scoring, knowledge of the nutrient requirements for both cows and stockers, and the nutrient content of the feed supply.

2) Sort cattle into groups based on their needs. “Thin, lactating cows obviously need

more and better quality feed than fleshy cows that will calve in March,” said Cole.

3) Carefully evaluate the cost and intake levels of convenience feeds. “Tubs and most self-fed supplements come with a high price tag and may not provide the correct amount of nutrients,” said Cole.

4) Monitor hay intake and try to reduce waste via unrolling or hay feeders. If hay rings are used just remember to move them frequently.

5) Protein is not normally the performance limiting nutrient. Energy, calories or total digestible nutrients are the usual limiters of gain, lactation and reproduction.

6) Calculate the actual cost of a pound of protein or TDN and then do some comparison shopping.

7) Water is the most important nutrient so it should be available at all times. “This is especially critical when salt is being used as an intake limiter,” said Cole.

8) Feeding fall-born calves a limited amount of concentrate feed instead of allowing them access to a self-feeder is preferred. Good quality alfalfa, alfalfa-grass hay can make an excellent creep feed. Once again, Cole says to compare costs.

“Even in tough times when input costs are high and returns low, good managers will come to the top and make the best of a bad situation,” said Cole. △



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