

Shopping For Feeds Can Cut Cost Of Cow Winter-Hay Supplements

COLUMBIA, MO.

When drought boosted corn and soybean prices, beef-herd owners faced new challenges. They can't rely on traditional feeds as low-cost supplements for winter forages.

"Producers must look at every alternative this winter," says a University of Missouri Extension beef nutritionist.

"Look at everything and compare prices," says Justin Sexten. Look at wheat, cotton, peanuts, rice and even milo beyond usual corn and soybean rations. Best choices may depend on what is available nearby.

Most producers learned the value of distillers grains and gluten feeds, both byproducts of corn processing. They already knew the value of soybean hulls, byproducts of making soybean meal.

"Compare prices based on nutritive value. Cheap feed might not be the best buy," Sexten says.

"Most feeders see corn at \$8 per bushel as out of sight," he says. When compared on price and feeding value, however, corn provides cheaper feed than soybean hulls, for example.

"The \$8 corn calculates out at \$285 per ton, compared to \$300 per ton for soybean hulls," Sexten says. However, corn with high starch content has limited use in a forage diet. Too much starch added to the cow's rumen upsets microbes that digest forage fibers.

"Price and feeding value will determine what to use," Sexten says. "As soybean prices continue to drop during harvest, keep an eye on soybean meal, a traditional supplement. It may become competitive. Soybean meal has twice the protein value of corn gluten feed."

Talking to farmers at MU Wurdack Farm, Sexten advised learning different alternative feeds. "Cottonseed meal is quite different from cottonseed hulls. Each serves a role in a ration. Cottonseed hulls, with high fiber, can be used in a calf ration. Cottonseed meal might be best for cows eating low-quality CRP hay, high in fiber."

Be wary of feed with hulls in the name, Sexten told herd owners. Hulls of soybeans have more nutrients than hulls of cotton, peanuts or rice. Cottonseed hulls and peanut hulls are used for fiber in diets. Rice hulls are best used for poultry litter.

Each supplement has different levels of protein and energy. Distillers grain from ethanol has more protein, energy and fat than corn gluten, a byproduct of corn sweeteners.

All have potential use in a diet for different types of livestock.

Nutritionists mix and match to formulate least-cost rations for each livestock need. For cows, rations are based on available forage.

Feeding challenges for cow-herd owners will be confounded by the range of nutrient levels in winter forages, especially low-end hay. The drought lowered crude protein content in much harvested hay.

A hay-quality test becomes the starting point for making any cow ration, Sexten says. "Hay with below 7 percent crude protein needs supplements."

Price comparisons on dozens of alternative feeds became more easily obtained on the MU Beef Resource website. The current list shows feeds and prices from 103 vendors. Links were added to feed lists from neighboring states.

MU byproduct price lists have been updated weekly since the 1980s. Originally for dairy farmers, the feed list attracts shopping by beef producers.

Go to <http://beef.missouri.edu> to click on co-product lists. The lists show feed, vendor, location and price.

Feeding cows the same way as last year might not work, Sexten says. Shopping and comparing prices can cut costs of keeping cows – and keeping a cow herd together in tough times.

"If there is ever a time when hay testing pays, this is it," Sexten told field day visitors. "Savings on high-priced feed can pay for a hay test in a few days." Δ



Link Directly To: CACHE RIVER



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