

# Starting The New Year Off Right

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**W**ith the start of a new year, it's fitting to reflect on the past year and look ahead to the new (and hopefully better!) year. On that theme, we've put together a list of a few things that we've seen over the years where there is usually some

room for improvement. Pick one or pick all of them. We hope you'll make it a point to make some improvements to your operation this year.

**Test your hay.** Some of the samples that have come into the Extension offices have been poorer than expected. Don't be offended by the results – look at it as an opportunity to spend your money on supplements more wisely, and perhaps adjust when you're harvesting your hay (weather depending, of course).

**Take body condition scores on your cows.** We talk about this a lot but how many of us actually do this? Just looking at the fat cover on a cow can give us an idea of how they're doing. If you don't think this is important, you haven't seen the data that shows how BCS correlates to reproductive success, and how reproductive success is tied to profitability. Key times: weaning, 45 days after weaning, 90 days before calving, calving time, and breeding.

**Soil test.** This is a lot like testing your hay – let's get the most out of our fertilizer dollars by knowing exactly what we need. We have agronomists on staff that can help with interpreting

the results and making recommendations on your particular forage system.

**Incorporate some legumes.** If you have tall fescue in your pastures, legumes are one strategy to dilute how much fescue the cattle are getting. Plus there are the benefits of better gains and a nitrogen source. At one of our forage field days during a discussion about legumes, a producer realized that the nitrogen fertilizer he had applied that spring was unnecessary and probably harmful to the legumes he had in his pastures!

**Add value to your calves before selling them.** In northwest Missouri we've got a lot of producers who are already doing this – vaccinating, de-horning, castrating, etc. There has been a lot of data gathered at livestock markets that shows how deep the discounts can be when you don't implement these practices.

**Take marketing of your cull cows seriously.** Selling your cull cows in the fall when everybody else is selling their cull cows may not be the best strategy. Considering how significant cull cow sales are to a cow-calf operation, look at your options carefully.

**Extend the grazing season and feed less hay.** Harvested forages are expensive. Planting forages that the cattle can graze when they'd typically be fed hay is one way to reduce how much hay you're feeding. Another area that's a problem for most producers is hay wastage. Hay feeder design has been shown to influence hay waste. Δ

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