

Study: Economical Feed Use Saves Dollars, Makes Sense

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

The results of a recent Scott County study suggest that cattle farmers can reduce feeding losses using alternative feeding methods, says Kenny Simon, Program Associate-Forages with the University of Arkansas, Division of Agriculture.

Hay feeding practices greatly influence the amount of hay required to carry a herd through the winter, says Simon. By using alternative feeding methods, cattle farmers can get more use out of the hay they have and thus incur fewer losses in feed waste.

“Unlike harvest losses, feeding losses are more easily identified and controlled,” says Simon.

The study compared three different methods of feeding hay: unrolled, unprotected, and shredded hay fed in tires. An average of 47 fall calving cows weighing approximately 1,250 pounds each was exposed to an allotment of hay for 24 hours.

On average, cattle consumed 61 percent of unrolled hay, 51 percent of unprotected hay, and nearly 100 percent of shredded hay fed in tires. However, no feeding method is perfect – there are advantages and disadvantages.

Unrolling disperses the bale of hay, allowing “boss” cows and timid cows to eat from the same bale at the same time, says Simon. Furthermore, it allows bales to be proportioned, and spreads the herd out over a larger area, reducing hoof action damage.

However, unrolling excess amounts of hay can contribute to losses as cattle will trample, lie in, or eliminate waste onto the remaining feed once they are full.

Using unprotected rolls of hay still remains

the most common practice. The cows used in the Scott County study were accustomed to hay being shredded and fed in tires, and this may have resulted in greater losses as they fed on unprotected rolls, says Simon.

“If the animals had been accustomed to eating hay that was unrolled, the amount of wastage might have been less,” he says.

The third feeding method involved shredding hay with a feed mixing wagon and auguring it into large tires. Although this method resulted in nearly all of the hay being eaten, it requires large specialized equipment and can be time-consuming, says Simon.

Variations in feed waste can also occur with different types of bale feeders. Unprotected bales had 40 percent of the feed wasted; cradle feeders 15 percent; wagon hay feeders 11 percent; ring feeders 6 percent and cone feeders 4 percent.

The ring feeder is the most commonly used feeder in Arkansas, says Simon. “A little more waste can be expected with this type of feeder as compared to the cone feeder, but it still prevents excessive waste,” he says.

Other types of feeders, including cradle feeders and hay wagons, have been seen in surrounding states but are not common in Arkansas, says Simon.

Hay storage and feeding loss demonstrations are being implemented across Arkansas as part of the 300 Day Grazing Program.

For more information about hay storage methods and feeding loss, visit Extension’s Web site, www.uaex.edu, or contact your county Extension agent. Δ



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