

Wheat Straw For Beef Cattle An Alternative For Winter

MT. VERNON, MO.

The shortage of decent hay for wintering cows, calves and yearlings has farmers scrambling for some type of replacement roughage.

According to Eldon Cole, a livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension, wheat straw may be an alternative most producers have not considered.

“Southwest Missouri does have some wheat straw available since the demand for it seems to be slumping along with the construction industry woes,” said Cole.

Wheat straw is not a high protein or energy source, but if supplemented properly it can be used for bred cows in 5 and 6 body condition scores. Cole says it can also comprise a sizeable portion of a fall-calving cow’s diet when the calves are being hand or creep fed.

Wheat straw should not be expected to be a big part of weaned calves’ diet.

Mature, bred cows can handle about 50 percent of their dry matter intake in the straw form according to Cole. The other 50 percent should be comprised of grass or grass-legume hay and a high energy-protein concentrate supplement.

In some cases, Cole says up to 60 percent could come from the straw but you do need to be watchful of protein, energy, minerals and vitamin A in all straw feeding cases.

“Compared to some of the sorry hay I’ve seen in bale yards and on trucks headed south and west, wheat straw could even be an improvement in nutrient value. The book values I find for wheat straw are 3 percent on crude protein and 42 to 43 percent on total digestible nutrients,” said Cole.

According to Cole, a producer can develop a nice ration using 15 to 18 pounds of straw per day along with 8 to 10 pounds of fair to poor quality grass hay and 5 to 6 pounds of dried distillers grains (DDGS). This ration would be suitable for 1100 to 1200 pounds cows, average milk production the first 90 days after calving or for dry, pregnant cows.

Wheat straw can be ammoniated to enhance its intake and nutrient level. Adding anhydrous ammonia in this cool/cold weather requires that 30 to 60 days may be required to complete the ammoniation process. Thus, straw treated in mid-December would not be ready to feed until early February.

“Years ago wheat straw was a staple feed in southwest Missouri, along with old-processed soybean or cottonseed meal. It may be time to sharpen the pencil and do some comparison shopping for the various roughages and probably DDGS and corn gluten feed as you plan for feeding the cow herd until green grass arrives,” said Cole. Δ