

Stretching Hay Supplies

Unusual weather patterns are causing havoc on our livestock operations. The unusual drought and lack of hay, and now the really cold weather and the increased demand for forages, have left farmers and ranchers “foraging” for more hay or trying to figure out how to make their supply last.

I’ve had quite a few questions on how to stretch the hay as much as possible. Fortunately, the beef cow is highly adaptable when it comes to feedstuffs and energy concentrations. We also have some by-products available that are high protein feeds with energy levels higher than corn, another advantage is that the starch has been removed during the ethanol process, which leaves a product that does not interfere with fiber digestion in beef cattle rations.

Here are a few ration suggestions for a 1350-pound cow, British bred beef cow, in late pregnancy.

Ration 1- Brome hay 14 pounds, Corn Stalks 14 pounds, Dried Distillers grain 2 pounds

Ration 2-Brome hay 12 pounds, Dried Distiller’s grain 7 pounds

Ration 3-Brome hay 12 pounds, Dried Distiller’s grain 4, Corn grain 3 pounds

Ration 4-Brome hay 12 pounds, Corn Silage 31 pounds

Fed with free choice mineral and vitamin mix. Because these rations have high energy feedstuffs, you will not be full-feeding cows, but rather they will be on limited intakes.

If dry corn gluten is more accessible, you can substitute gluten for the Distiller’s grain, by adding 10% more. So if the ration calls for 4 pounds of distiller’s grains, you can substitute 4.4 pounds of corn gluten.

Make sure the bunk space is adequate so all cows get their share. Have a good fences or offer a free choice bale of lower quality, such as cornstalks, soybean residue or oat straw. This can act as a filler.

Make every effort to reduce feed waste. For some producers, tub grinding feeds or feeding a total mixed ration in bunks, tires or other feeders have dramatically reduced feed waste and lowered winter feeding cost. For hay feeding operations, research has shown that hay rings or panel feeders in good repair can help minimize waste. Research has also shown that restricting time access to the

hay feeder can also decrease waste. If you are unrolling hay in an open field, be sure to feed only what is needed on a daily basis. Feeding more causes substantial loss.

Remember cows laying on snow need 25% more energy, also during snaps of cold weather, they will need 10% more feed.

Source: Stretching Hay Supplies for Beef Cow Herds, Iowa State University, IBC 45.