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## Do You Have Enough Hay for the Winter?

As we move toward the winter months, there are lots of things to get done. Some people are already feeding hay, and some still have some stockpiled grass for the livestock to graze into the winter months. In either case, here are a few things to consider as we move into the month of December. Some of these need to be done as soon as possible to maximize the effort.

1. Cull cows that need to go. If you have kept good records, this is one of the times they will come in handy. Look at the records to see things like production of pounds of calf, the age of the cow, and the ability to breed back on time. These should all be considered. Also look at the soundness of the cow's feet and legs. She needs to be able to get around well for grazing over several acres. Do not forget the udder soundness. The cows should be productive in all quarters and not have an udder that is difficult for newborn calves to nurse. Do not forget the eyes. There are some early signs of problems that can lead to "cancer eye" in cows, like little pink tumors on the eye or eyelids, as well as other signs. Examine the eyes the next time you put the cows through the chute. Last, but not least, cull any cows that have bad attitudes. If you have a cow that has an attitude problem, SHE NEEDS TO GO even if you have enough feed. I know, she produces good calves, but she is still a problem that you do not need.

If you still have more cows than you have feed, start looking at the older cows first. Cows begin to decline around 10 years of age, so knowing how old your cows are is another good use of the records that you keep. You may want to check the cow's teeth to help evaluate her age and her ability to use the feed that you make available to her.

2. Get your forages tested. Regardless if you have decent hay, corn stalks, CRP hay, or soybean stubble, knowing what nutrition your forage will provide will give you a better idea of what you need to do to meet the needs of the cows with a supplement.
3. Realize that corn is not as high as it sounds when you compare it to other feeds. Corn at \$4.00 per bushel is just a little over 7 cents per pound and \$142.86 per ton. Corn can be bought for well under \$4.00 per bushel now if you have storage. A few gravity beds will hold several bushels of temporary storage. That still is not as cheap as it was a few years ago, but when you compare the energy you get compared to a ton of low quality hay or corn stalks, it is something to look at, because the feed value is not even close. Buying corn, distiller's grain, corn gluten, soybean hull pellets or other feed stuffs **now** will most likely save you money, as prices typically rise in the coming months. Granted, we are not in a typical year. Things are not close to typical right now when it comes to prices or predictions.

When it comes to feeding the cows, you have some work to do. It is hard to predict what kind of weather we will have in the coming months. Keep in mind you need to meet the nutritional needs, not just keep them full. If you are feeding lower quality hay, then supplementing them with corn may be a good option for your herd. If cows are in less than ideal condition, don't wait any longer to try to put weight back on them for winter.



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Keep in mind that cows that are bred for spring calving may be at their lowest need for nutrients right now. I said may be because spring calving is a term used kind of loosely. If spring calving means cows start dropping calves in March and April, then the lower nutrition needs in November is accurate unless they are in poor body condition as I mentioned earlier. However, if spring calving means calves on the ground in January, then the game just changed. To be more accurate, the cows will need the least nutrition when they are without a nursing calf and at least 3 months prior to calving. With that said, you should be feeding your poorest quality hay at least 3 months prior to your calving season. The cows will need additional energy and protein in the last 3 months of pregnancy. Dry cows should have at least 7 to 8 percent protein, while young cows (2 and 3 year olds) are still growing, they will need 11 to 12 percent protein. The protein should be increased on the last three months of pregnancy to around 11 percent and keep it there while they are nursing calves.

Ideally heifers and young cows should be separated from the older cows. For starters, it is impossible to feed different protein levels if they are together, but also keep in mind that the younger cattle will most often be pushed aside by the more dominant older cows, thus not receiving the protein or energy that they require.

4. Realize that cows do not need to have their head stuck in a hay ring from Christmas until Easter to survive the winter. Cows can be fed limited hay with a supplement and be just fine. Cows fed 10 or so pounds of corn per day with a protein supplement can be fine with 10 pounds of hay. This may require feeding hay in a location that you can keep the cows out of for part of the day. Ideally feeding the corn in the morning, and then allowing them to the hay rings for 2 or 3 hours about 6 or 7 hours after the corn would work best. This will require extra management, but time might be cheaper than letting them eat all of the hay they want.
5. Maintain a good mineral program. Loose mineral is the best bet for cows getting what they need on a daily basis. The cost of the mineral is not the only thing you need to look at when deciding which mineral to use.

Keep in mind that you need to feed your cattle, but not the parasites. Maintain a good parasite control program throughout the year. I addressed this in this column a couple weeks ago. Consult your local veterinarian for more information.

## **Weed School in Wilmington**

With the problems weeds have caused in recent years, maybe we need to consider different options for controlling them. Resistance has been an issue for years and the list of resistant weeds continues to grow year after year. Now we also have additional weed species showing up in Southern Ohio.

On Thursday, December 8, 2016 OSU Extension will offer a Weed Management Program at the Clinton Co. Fairgrounds in Wilmington. The program will begin at 1:00 p.m. and is scheduled to last until 3:30 or so. Discussion will involve several of the problem weeds, management strategies, sprayer information and more. Please RSVP by December 7<sup>th</sup> at the Clinton Co. Extension Office (937) 382-0901.