



Due to the drought, hay supplies and pasture grass will be reduced for many local farmers.

Drought Forces Farmers To Stretch Hay Supplies

Many Lauderdale County cattle producers have inadequate supplies of pasture grass and hay to feed their livestock due to the drought. This lack of grass and hay resulted in local cattlemen selling twice as many cattle in July of this year as last year at most livestock auctions across the state. This article discusses some options that cattle farmers have for providing adequate nutrition with limited amounts of hay.

First of all, it is important to remember that cattle are ruminants and thus need some forage (fiber) in their daily diet. In general, the minimal amount required is about 0.5% of body weight which would equate to 5 to 6 pounds for 1,000- to 1,200-pound cows. Because most beef producers use hay in the form of a large round bale, it is difficult to limit hay consumption to 5 to 6 pounds per day.

There are only two realistic ways to limit hay consumption with round bales. The hay can be unrolled and offered at a predetermined amount. Another way would be to put an adequate number of rolls in a small area so that the cows can be put into the area for about 2 hours per day in order to control the amount of hay that they consume. With this program it is important that all cows have access to the hay, approximately 1 roll for every 10 cows. If small, square bales of hay are available, then it becomes much easier to offer 5 to 6 pounds of hay per day.

Other sources of roughage for cows include peanut hulls, cottonseed hulls, gin trash, cotton motes or any other by-product roughages that may be available in our area. Kudzu is also a roughage option.

Now that the hay has been conserved by some sort of limit feeding system, what is needed to meet the nutrient needs of the cow? For a 1,000-pound cow that has not yet calved, we would need to provide her with about 12 pounds of a grain mix that contains approximately 12% crude protein. One such mix would be to blend 575 pounds of corn with 50 pounds of soybean or cottonseed meal. Another possibility would be to feed soybean hulls, corn gluten feed, whole cottonseed or distiller's grains. Also, check with your local livestock feed dealer to see if they have a blend suitable for your needs.

Once the cows calve and begin lactating, their daily nutrient requirements will increase, and they will require approximately 18 pounds of the grain mix, soybean hulls or corn gluten feed per day plus their hay allowance. With this system, the cows would be fed 12 to 18 pounds of the concentrate per day (depending on stage of production) and given 5 to 6 pounds of forage per day. For this system it is important to have adequate bunk space for feeding the cows to make sure that the boss cows do not consume the majority of the feed.

In general, if the cows can access both sides of the bunk, then a 10-foot trough will accommodate 10 to 12 mature cows. It is very important to note that good feeding management is a must when feeding cows in this manner. It would be very easy to founder some cows when feeding this amount of a corn-based supplement per day. Obviously, this system is quite labor-intensive and requires a large amount of daily feeding; however, if hay supplies are severely limited, it may be the only alternative available.

For more information call the Lauderdale County Extension System at 766-6223 or visit our web site at www.aces.edu/Lauderdale.