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### **Headline: Winter Feeding of Beef Cattle**

**WARSAW, Mo.** – Over the past few weeks, some of my Extension agronomy colleagues and I have been holding meetings about winter feeding programs and management of drought-stressed pastures. Below are a few main points from the feeding portion of those meetings.

Forage quality is normally extremely variable from field to field and cutting to cutting, and this year is no exception. Based on grass hay samples I have received so far this year, crude protein has ranged from 6.2% to 17.5%. TDN, an estimate of the energy value of the hay, has ranged from 43.8% to 66.9%. There is no “average” hay and hay that was put up “in pretty good shape” doesn’t replace the information gained from a hay test. Cost-effective feeding programs demand more accurate information than a guess.

Baled corn stalks are very poor quality feed by themselves. Blending stalks with grass hay or corn silage will improve ration quality and stretch limited hay or silage supplies. This requires some thought however, since putting out one bale of corn stalks and one bale of grass hay is not the same as providing a mixed blend of the two forages. All animals must have equal access to each feed in order for this to work.

Monitor body condition score (BCS) of cows and heifers. Think of BCS as a gas gauge to show if animals are too thin or just right. Remember the job of cows is to have and raise calves. Poor body condition at calving results in increased calving difficulty, poor quality colostrum, and lower re-breeding rates. The unborn calf may also be negatively impacted by poor maternal nutrition. Keep long-term goals in mind. Don’t sacrifice future herd performance and productivity by keeping too many animals around and “roughing” them through the winter.

Other topics covered in these meetings included reducing feeding waste, limiting the time animals have access to hay, and limiting the amount of hay being fed per animal. Each of these management ideas comes with a set of issues that needs to be thought through, but can be effectively implemented if the producer decides to make one of these options work.

In an abnormal situation, normal management may not be effective. Be open to new ideas and be ready to implement viable options for each individual operation. If you have questions on forage sampling, interpreting hay test results, or developing a winter feeding program, contact me at [schmitze@missouri.edu](mailto:schmitze@missouri.edu) or by calling the Benton County Extension Center at (660) 438-5012.

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