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Headline: Winter Feed Costs

SEDALIA, Mo. – Feed costs are the largest expense for beef cattle producers, and much of that cost is incurred with winter feeding programs. Brent Carpenter, Field Specialist in Ag Business, and I have worked to develop estimates of winter feed costs based on hay quality and stage of production.

Rations were developed for both spring and fall calving cows. Hay quality was defined as good (10% crude protein, 58% TDN), fair (8% crude protein, 53% TDN), or poor (6% crude protein, 48% TDN). An Excel spreadsheet has been developed to incorporate current feed ingredient prices with the various rations that were developed for each hay quality type and cow calving season.

A total of 19 example rations using different supplement ingredients and amounts were developed for spring calving cows across all hay types. Median supplement level for good hay was 1.95 pounds with a range from 1.15 to 2.15 pounds. Using current by-product feed prices, supplement costs ranged from \$0.12 to \$0.21 with a median of \$0.19 per head per day. Median supplement level for fair hay was 3.15 pounds with a range from 2.15 to 4.15 pounds per head per day. Supplement costs ranged from \$0.20 to \$0.38 per head per day with a median cost of \$0.28 per head per day. Poor hay required 4.65 to 6.15 pounds of supplement per head per day with supplement costs ranging from \$0.40 to \$0.55. Median supplementation rate was 5.15 pounds and median supplement cost was \$0.47 per head per day.

When current prices for hay were included, median feed costs per head per day were \$1.74 for good hay, \$1.31 for fair hay, and \$1.14 for poor hay. This is assuming hay prices of \$100 per ton for good hay, \$70 for fair hay, and \$50 for poor hay. Producers who purchase hay might be able to buy lower quality hay provided they supply the necessary nutrients not present in lower quality hay and have the ability to feed larger amounts of supplement on a daily basis. Realize there may be additional problems when purchasing poor quality hay such as extreme storage, transportation, and feeding losses, inclusion of weeds and weed seeds, etc. These factors are not included in this analysis.

The financial picture is different for producers who are putting up their own hay. Using a hay price of \$62 per ton for all hay quality categories, median total feed costs using good quality hay were \$1.15 per head per day. Median total feed costs using fair quality hay was \$1.19 per head per day and poor quality hay had a median total daily feed cost of \$1.30.

Several take home messages can be gleaned from this information. First, it is important to know the quality of hay being fed to the cow herd. Supplementation rate ranged from 1.15 pounds to 6.15 pounds, and supplementation cost ranged from \$0.12 to \$0.55 depending on hay quality. Second, individual supplement ingredient costs must also be considered, since all of these rations were formulated to provide equal nutrient content. Third, for producers who put up their own hay, they should make every effort to put up as high of quality hay as possible, because the lowest supplementation rate and cost is associated with the highest quality hay.

Hay quality will likely be extremely variable this year. Be sure to forage test hay supplies soon so supplementation programs can be developed to meet your herd's nutritional needs for the least cost. If you have questions or would like assistance with this process, contact me at the Pettis County Extension Center at (660) 827-0591.

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