Angus Advisor

January Beef Cow Herd Management Tips

Midwest/Upper Midwest Region
by Harlan Ritchie, Michigan State University

1. If forage quality is low, consider having a sample analyzed to determine possible supplement needs. Energy, protein, phosphorus, selenium and vitamin A are nutrients likely to be deficient.

2. Corn or corn silage is often the cheapest supplemental energy source in many areas. Use this formula to compare energy sources on basis of cost per pound (lb.) of total digestible nutrients (TDN):

Cost ($/ton) ÷ (2,000 x % dry matter x % TDN in dry matter) = Cost per lb. of TDN.

For example, $20/ton corn silage: $20 ÷ (2000 x .35 x .68) = $.042/lb. of TDN.

3. If supplemental protein is required, beware of needless overspending on exotic commercial mixes. Use the following formula to compare supplemental proteins on the basis of cost per lb. of crude protein (CP):

Cost of supplement ($/ton) ÷ (2,000 lb. x % CP) = Cost per lb. of CP.

For example, $200/ton of 44% CP supplement: $200 ÷ (2,000 x .44) = $.227/lb. of CP.

4. Supplemental mineral needs vary from region to region, depending on soils and vegetation. A general purpose mix that has proven useful for wintering cow herds is: 45% dicalcium phosphate; 20% selenium (Se) 200 premix (supplies 40 ppm Se); 35% trace mineral salt.

In areas where magnesium, copper, zinc, cobalt or manganese are extremely deficient, you will need to increase the levels of these elements.

5. Vitamin A may be fed in supplement or injected. Injections last 90-100 days. Injected dosage should be 2-3 million IU per cow.

6. Be sure the cow herd has an adequate water supply. Depending on body size and stage of production, cattle need 5-11 gallons per head per day, even in the coldest weather.

7. Provide cattle some protection, such as windbreaks, during severe winter weather to reduce energy requirements. A woodlot is ideal.

Rocky Mountain West Region
by Doug Hixon, University of Wyoming

1. Know the nutrient analysis of harvested forages, then formulate balanced rations to meet the needs of the different classes of your cattle. Spring-calving cows are approaching the last third of gestation, a time of increased nutrient requirements due to fetal growth.

2. Higher-quality forages should be utilized for replacement females and younger cows that may lack body condition and be more nutritionally stressed.

3. If possible, separate thin cows or cows that lack adequate body condition from the herd and feed separately. These thin cows are often 2- and 3-year-olds. A higher plane of nutrition for these thin cows allows feed to be utilized more efficiently and helps reduce their postpartum interval to first estrus.

4. Realize that once the beef cow calves and lactation commences, her nutritional requirements increase about 25%.

5. Supplement minerals that are deficient in your area. Phosphorus is generally deficient in harvested Western forages. Some form of phosphorus should probably be supplemented until the cows go out on green grass. Micromineral deficiencies are often area specific, so consult with your local veterinarian about identified deficiencies.

6. A cow's liver has the ability to store vitamin A from 100-120 days after the consumption of green grass. If cows are now consuming a low-quality forage, you may consider feeding or injecting a vitamin A supplement. Alfalfa can also be a good source of vitamin A.

7. Prepare for calving season. Inspect and repair calving facilities. Clean and sanitize calving sheds and corrals. Check calving equipment — calf pullers, OB chains, etc. Have bedding and feed supply readily available to calving area.

8. Consult with your veterinarian in regard to pre- and postpartum vaccination schedules. Have appropriate vaccines on inventory and administer according to recommended schedules. Subcutaneous (Sub-Q) vaccine administration is preferred if label approved. If intramuscuar (IM) injection

9. Have an adequate supply of eartags available to properly identify newborn calves.

10. Monitor performance and body condition as severe winter weather can increase energy requirements. Windbreaks can reduce wind chill and help "save on your energy bill."

Southern Region
by R.S. Sand, University of Florida

1. Apply lime to fields for summer crops.

2. Check for lice and treat if necessary. Control weeds in cool-season pastures. Begin grazing winter clover pastures when approximately 6 inches (in.) in height; rye should be 12-18 in. high.

3. Check mineral feeders.

4. Buy only performance-tested bulls with superior records. Put bulls out for October calving season and make up breeding herd lists if using single-sire herds.

5. Watch for calf scours.

6. Give bulls extra feed and care so they will be in condition for breeding season.

7. Make sure cow herd has access to adequate fresh water.

8. Get taxes filed.

9. Discuss herd health with your veterinarian and outline a program for the year. Review your herd health program regularly with your vet.

10. Observe cow herd for calving dificulty. Carry a pocket notebook to record head, breeding adnormalities, discharges, abortions, retained placentas, difficult calvings and other data.

11. Watch for grass tetany on winter pastures. Increase magnesium levels in mineral mixes if grass tetany has been a problem (and if you aren't already using a high-magnesium mineral).

5. Examine bulls for breeding soundness and semen quality prior to the breeding season (60 days prior).

6. Vaccinate cows and heifers against vibriosis and leptospirosis prior to the breeding season.