

Angus Advisor

February Beef Cow Herd Management Tips

Midwest/Upper Midwest Region

by Harlan Ritchie, Michigan State University

- Below-zero weather and wind can increase energy requirements 20%-50%. Increase feed accordingly.
- For some herds, calving season is here. Check the following items:
 - ✓ Calving assistance equipment
 - ✓ Facilities to warm chilled calves — heat lamps, warming boxes
 - ✓ Frozen colostrum
 - ✓ Oral calf feeder for administering fluids to stressed or dehydrated calves
 - ✓ Electrolytes for dehydrated calves
 - ✓ Pharmaceuticals for scours and respiratory problems
 - ✓ 7% iodine solution for calf's navel
 - ✓ Ear tags
 - ✓ Selenium injections if white muscle disease is a problem in your region
 - ✓ Vitamin A injection for cows and calves if forage quality is low
 - ✓ Dehorning and castrating materials
 - ✓ Implants to stimulate growth of non-replacement calves
- To ensure early rebreeding, make certain the lactating cow herd is on an adequate plane of nutrition. For herds on harvested feedstuffs, consider the following diets as a guide:
 - Full-feed of mixed legume-grass hay (30-40 pounds [lb.]) plus grain, if necessary.
 - 60-80 lb. of corn silage, plus 0.5-2 lb. 40% protein supplement or equivalent.
 - 15-20 lb. legume hay, plus 30-35 lb. corn silage.
 - Free-choice mineral mix containing a minimum of 8% phosphorus, preferably 10%.

- As stated in January "Angus Advisor," if supplemental protein is needed, compare supplements on price/lb. of crude protein (CP). A word of caution: Urea is the cheapest form of CP, but it is not well-utilized on poor-quality forage diets like crop residues. On high-quality forages, such as corn silage, urea-based supplements work well.

Southern Region

by R.S. Sand, University of Florida

- Top-dress winter forages if needed.
- Check and fill mineral feeders.
- Put bulls out with breeding herd.
- Work calves — identify, implant with growth stimulant, vaccinate.
- Make sure lactating cows are receiving an adequate level of energy.
- Watch calves for signs of respiratory diseases.
- While prices are seasonally up, cull cows that failed to calve.
- Check cow herd for lice and treat if needed.

Rocky Mountain West Region

by Doug Hixon, University of Wyoming

- Whether you calve in January, February or March, you are in a critical time from a nutrition standpoint. Continue to monitor body condition of bred females and those in early lactation. Adjust ration as needed to maintain adequate body condition. Cold, wet and windy conditions will increase energy requirements of the beef animal. Windbreaks can be especially beneficial in the wide-open areas of the West.
- Observe cattle for lice infestations. If a problem, treat with appropriate product cleared for such use. Read the label, and follow instructions. The use of some products requires a minimum amount of time prior to parturition.

- Work with your veterinarian to develop the most appropriate precalving vaccination program for your area. You may already have administered these vaccines, depending on when you calve. These vaccines should be administered within 14 days prior to parturition so that newborn calves can obtain the needed passive immunity to protect them against scours and other diseases. Colostrum is also a needed source of vitamin A and energy for the newborn.
- Obtain and freeze a colostrum supply to have available in case of emergencies. It is most effective to build this bank out of colostrum obtained from cows on the same premises where it will be utilized. A supply of colostrum from a local dairy may serve as an effective substitute. Commercial colostrum substitutes are available if you can't obtain a natural source. The newborn calf should consume an appropriate amount of colostrum as soon as possible after parturition, hopefully within 30-60 minutes. After 12 hours, the digestive tract of the calf undergoes changes that don't allow absorption of the needed antibodies.
- Be prepared to move newborns to warm, dry facilities if parturition takes place outside during inclement weather. Stress from weather conditions can make a newborn more susceptible to disease. This problem may be compounded by lack of or delayed consumption of colostrum.
- Lactation increases the nutritional requirements of the beef female. This is especially critical in the young female that is still growing. Two-year-old first-calf heifers and possibly 3-year-olds should be managed and fed separately from the mature cow herd so that competition can be minimized and nutrients most effectively utilized. Feed higher-quality forages during this critical period.
- Price and compare any needed supplemental feeds based on the cost per pound of actual nutrients needed (i.e., per pound of protein, energy, phosphorus, etc.). Don't forget, good-quality alfalfa is an excellent source of protein and vitamin A. When corn prices are high, it may even be a competitive source of energy.
- Check weight and performance of replacement heifer calves to make sure the winter weather hasn't interfered with gains needed to achieve their most appropriate target weight prior to the breeding season.

