

It will be only a short time before winter will be here and beef producers will be starting winter feeding. The feed supply available for the winter of 1984-85 may be tight for many producers because there is little or no carryover feed supply from last winter. Producers must depend on the feed produced during 1984 to get them through the upcoming winter. With some planning it should be possible for most beef producers to develop an economical wintering program.

The first step in planning for the

and probably at a lower price than it will be later in the season. Some options other than feed purchases will be discussed later.

If it is decided to reduce cattle numbers to the point where the feed supply will be adequate, a decision must be made regarding which animals will be sold. The goal should be to sell those animals that have the least potential to make a profit for the beef producer. All available records, such as AHIR records or those obtained from state beef cattle improvement pro-

ment needs so they can be purchased early.

Consider all feed sources

Feed that beef animals harvest is usually much less costly than harvested and stored feed. To take advantage of this savings, a producer may want to stockpile some fescue for early winter use. This can be done by fertilizing fescue pastures with nitrogen between mid-August and mid-September and keeping animals off until after frost. Your county agent can provide more details on stockpiling.

Start Planning Winter Feeding Now

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1984-85 feeding season is to take an inventory of the available feed supply. How much feed is available? How good is it? Is the feed stored so that the lowest quality feed can be utilized first? All of these questions need to be answered as soon as possible.

Know needs, supply

Next, an inventory of the animals to be wintered should be taken. This inventory should break the animals down into groups (for example: cows with calves, cows to calve early, cows to calve late, calves, bulls, replacement heifers). With this detailed breakdown it will be possible to accurately estimate the feed required. Just a total head count will not suffice since each group will have different nutrient needs and thus a difference in total amount of feed required to get them through the winter.

After inventory, the next step is to see if the available feed will be sufficient to meet the estimated needs of the herd. If the supply is adequate then the preparations for winter feeding should be relatively simple. If the feed supply is short, some important decisions must be made. Either some additional feed must be purchased or some animals must be sold. If the decision is to secure more feed, this should be done prior to the beginning of winter feeding. At this time there should be more feed available for purchase

grams, should be used as aids in making the culling list. Animals that should be culled include open cows, cows producing lightweight calves, old cows, cows with bad udders or other physical problems and calves that do not have the potential to gain economically.

After feed purchase and animal culling decisions are made, it is time to make a detailed feeding plan that will be as economical as possible. The first step is to have available feeds tested. Representative samples of each cutting

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and kind of hay and each grain to be fed should be sent to a state forage testing laboratory for analysis. Your local extension agent should have information on how to take samples and sample bags for mailing samples to the laboratory. If a description of the cattle to be fed is included with the sample, feeding recommendations can often be returned along with the chemical analyses. This information can be used to prevent costly overfeeding or underfeeding. Also the information can be used to determine protein supple-

While fescue pastures are being stockpiled, where can animals be kept and what will they eat? Grazing crop residues is probably the best answer. Crop residues, when utilized immediately after the grain is harvested, can provide a considerable amount of grazing. It is best to allow animals access to only a small area at a time to reduce selectivity and to get better utilization of the residues. Since the quality of crop residues is relatively poor, it is best to let dry pregnant cows graze them and keep other animals on better pastures. The dry pregnant cow can best use the crop residues because her nutrient requirements are less than other classes of beef animals on the farm.

By-product feeds—such as cottonseed hulls, peanut hulls, chicken litter and distillery by-products—may also be used to stretch the winter feed supply. Each of these can be used as a part of the beef ration, but should not be used as the total ration. Since a discussion on each of these products could be several pages long, it will probably be better to just say they are available in some areas and specific questions about feeding should be directed to your local extension agent.

Small grain pastures can also be sown for use by beef animals during the fall, winter and spring. The amount of feed produced will depend on how early pastures are seeded and the quali-

ty of grazing conditions. Winter utilization of these pastures may be limited by weather conditions. Wet conditions may result in poor footing. Some of the problems with footing may be reduced by sod seeding in bermuda grass or other sod (preferably one that will not be growing at the same time as the small grain).

Best to sort cattle

As winter feeding begins, the animals should be divided into groups if possible. These groups should include at least the following: dry cows, cows with calves, bulls and replacement heifers. Grouping the animals allows for them to be fed according to their needs. When all animals are fed together, some animals get more feed than they need while others do not receive enough feed. In particular, dry cows will get more than they need while replacement heifers and cows pregnant with their second calf will probably not get enough feed. As can be easily seen, grouping is not only desirable, it is necessary.

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Finally, beef producers must make efficient use of available feed. Beef cattle will waste a tremendous amount of feed if it is not fed properly. If hay is fed in a manger, it should be in good repair so animals cannot pull the hay out and trample it. If hay is fed in large round bales or stacks, the bales or stacks should be surrounded by some type device (rack) that will prevent the animals from wasting the feed. Research has shown that up to one-third more hay is required to winter a cow when a rack is not used. Feed wastage can be kept within tolerable limits if good management is applied.

In summary, it appears that the winter feed supply may be somewhat limited, consequently it must be properly managed if it is to be adequate. Plans for winter feeding should be formulated now, then followed throughout the winter to ensure that enough feed is available and that the cattle are wintered economically. **AJ**