



I Have a Question... A Wealth of Information at Our Fingertips And Some Tips on Winter Feeding

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FORAGE

When you have a question about the beef business, or your agriculture business in general, where do you start to find the answer? Call the neighbor, call your Dad? Look it up in an encyclopedia? Call your veterinarian? Google it on your computer? How about a smart phone? Technology has truly changed the way we gather information; it seems that information can be at our fingertips within seconds. I do still remember going to the library and using the card catalogue to find information during my school days, and even in university, I often preferred to go to the library to find the hard copy of a textbook chapter or scientific article, but as each year passes, I find I am more inclined to turn to the online world to access the information I need. In fact, I recently decided that it was time to join the world of 'Twitter;' I had been putting it off for some time, but the thing that caught my eye about Twitter was not all of the gossip about celebrities or even connecting with friends, but the access to current and valuable information in the agriculture world. Prior to joining Twitter, my husband would email me links to articles and pictures he saw on Twitter, before finally saying, 'Why don't you just get your own account?' So finally, I signed up, and have been enjoying a feast of useful and very interesting tidbits of information!

The handy thing about Twitter is that you can choose who you 'follow.' Each time you open up your Twitter account, there will be a list of posts or tweets from everyone you are following. If you see a tweet that you're interested in, you click on it, and it will take you to a picture, article, short update, or story. All of the tweets must be 140 characters or less, so as you scroll along, you can quickly pick up information, click on it if you'd like to read more, or keep moving along. You can also 'retweet' a post, so that others following you can see it, or you can add your own messages, articles and pictures. As I mentioned, I didn't join Twitter to follow celebrities or keep up on gossip, and all of the organizations or individuals that I follow are agriculture related. You will find everything and everyone from the Western Producer and Alberta Agriculture to your tech-savvy neighbor on Twitter; PCBFA has also joined Twitter, so please follow us if you haven't already @PCBFA! I have also chosen to follow a few new organizations out there that have more recently become available to producers; groups such as FarmOn, RealAgriculture and the Beef Cattle Research Center. I highly recommend taking a good look at all of these websites, as they not only offer current and extremely useful information, but the videos and articles that are posted are also very positive and encouraging, and I am often left feeling encouraged and inspired to continue being a part of the agriculture industry.

Here are a few of my favorite people and organizations to follow on Twitter; they are also my go-to places when I need to do some research and I'm looking for credible sources:

RealAgriculture	Agriculture More Than Ever	Canadian Young Farmers Forum
The Western Producer	Jake Meyer (iCalve App)	Cattlemen's Young Leaders
Alberta Beef Producers	Farms.com	Savory Institute
Beef Cattle Research Center	Beef Cattle News	4-H Canada
FarmOn	Canadian Beef Inc	BEEF Magazine
Alberta Agriculture	Canadian Cattlemen's Association	Canadian Beef Facts

One website that I often like to visit is the Beef Cattle Research Center, and I am always interested when they put up a new post on Twitter, as it is likely a link to a new blog or video that contains very interesting, useful and timely information. RealAgriculture.com is also associated with these blogs and videos, and all of the information can be accessed through their website. The most recent blog and video that were posted contain information and an overview on some of the research being done around the topic of the cattle industry's impact on the environment, and the value of proper grazing management. There is currently a very timely video that can be found on the Beef Research Council's website, which is part of a series of 'Beef School' videos, titled, "Beef School- Managing Winter Nutrition," and it features a researcher from the University of Manitoba, Dr Kim Ominski. When you click on the link to each video, a very handy list of other resources related to the video topic also appears, so it can save a lot of time when you're searching for information. Most of the videos in the series are about 4-5 minutes long, so I decided to watch the video, take some notes, and pass the information on to PCBFA members! The video sets out to answer the question: "How do the nutrient requirements of cattle change in the winter throughout their production cycle?"

Feed is one of the biggest variable costs on a cow-calf operation, and a feeding program is very important because of the effect it has on a herd's overall production. A few facts and tips I gathered from the video, as well as a few of the other sources that were listed on feeding cows during the winter:

- A cow's nutrient requirements change during winter for two reasons: cold weather and stage of pregnancy, so both must be accounted for when making a winter feeding plan.

EVENTS

Winter Watering Systems Tour

Join us to take a look at innovative watering systems & learn how to choose & set one up on your own place

10 am start
Jan 25th Sunset House
Feb 1st Hines Creek

To RSVP & get directions, call Monika @ (780) 523-4033

2014 AGM

February 7, 2013, 5pm
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Fairview, AB
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RSVP to Morgan @
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- Cows are very hardy animals, and their bodies make adjustments for winter including growing a longer hair coat to withstand the cold. However, when temperatures begin to drop significantly, the cold will begin to impact a cow's nutrient requirements, specifically energy and protein. The colder it gets, the more energy she must use to keep her body temperature at a normal level. When feeding, we can meet a cow's increased needs by increasing the volume of feed fed per day, but once a cow can only eat so much, and once her rumen is full, she won't eat any more. When the dry matter intake maximum has been reached, we must feed a more energy dense ration to help a herd maintain body condition. It's also good to keep in mind that lower quality feeds are less digestible, and cows will eat less pounds per day of a poor quality feed than a higher quality feed. This is because the rumen must work longer and harder to digest poor quality feed, keeping the cow full longer, therefore, not allowing her to eat more as the rumination process occurs. A cow's digestive system can process higher quality feed quicker than low quality feed, so she will feel full for a shorter amount of time and be able to eat a larger volume of feed, which is why when temperatures are very cold, feeding at least a portion of the diet in the form of a high quality feed (such as very good hay or a bit of grain) is important to help cows maintain body condition.
- A good rule of thumb: for every degree that the temperature drops below -20°C, a cow's energy requirements increase by ~2%. We often tend to focus on protein when looking at a cow's requirements, but energy is very important and must not be overlooked, especially during cold weather.
- The second important factor that affects a cow's nutritional needs during the winter is her production stage or stage of pregnancy. During early to mid gestation, a dry cow's requirements are quite minimal; TDN levels should be around 55% during mid pregnancy and 60% during late pregnancy. The target for protein should be between 7% and 9%. The important stage of production is after calving, during lactation when a cow must put a large portion of nutrients into milk production. After calving or during lactation, the target for TDN should be between 63% and 65%.
- When our feeding plan doesn't meet our cow herd's requirements, they will begin to lose body condition, which could result in thin cows who won't cycle as soon as they should after calving, as her body's resources will be put towards gaining condition instead of reproduction
- A water source is also very important, and snow can be an option as long as there is an adequate amount and it doesn't have a hard crust. Cows in early lactation should have a reliable water source, as they are not able to eat enough snow to support milk production
- Minerals and vitamins are important in a winter feeding program; requirements will increase after calving
- For more information on developing a winter feeding program, call your closest PCBFA office, or search out these publications, which were referenced in the writing of this article:
Beef Cattle's Adjustment to Cold Weather- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food
Agri-Facts: Beef Ration Rules of Thumb- Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

I know that accessing information online isn't for everyone, and I will continue to faithfully read through each issue of the Northern Horizon that comes in the mail, I will be renewing my print subscription of the Western Producer, and the Canadian Cattlemen is still my favorite magazine. I have to admit that it is very handy to be able to access information in this new way, and I do appreciate being able to access information very quickly. And even though we're not the most tech-savvy bunch, if you'd like a few tips on finding information online or getting set up on Twitter, feel free to contact your PCBFA staff and we'd be happy to do our best to help you out!

2013 Canadian Forage and Grasslands Conference

At the beginning of December, PCBFA staff and several of our board members took in the annual Canadian Forage and Grassland Association Conference in Olds- "Moving Forages Mainstream- The Challenges, Pitfalls and Opportunities." Day 1 consisted of a tour of several progressive operations in the Olds area that use forages in unique and efficient ways. There were many outstanding researchers in attendance, and presentations were given on current research being done in the forage sector. The forage export industry was also a part of the conference, and it was very interesting to hear from international presenters. The CFGA is a member based organization representing all sectors of the forage and grassland industry; the focus of the CFGA is to promote the growth of the forage and grassland sector at home and abroad and provide a national voice for the industry.

Interpreting Those Feed Tests

Have you had a chance to collect and send in forage samples but need some help interpreting the numbers? PCBFA staff would be glad to help you take a look at the feed tests and we would also be happy to pass on a few tips for balancing your winter feeding rations.



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