

Forage Facts

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A cow will spend approximately 8 hours a day chewing her cud, which is a necessary step in her digestive system.

To Graze, or Not to Graze? The Value of Stockpiled Grass

By: Katie McLachlan

Fall is here, and most areas across the Peace that I've seen still have ample grass, or at the very least, more than we usually see this time of year. Talking to producers this fall, I have heard quite a few times that they have more grass than they know what to do with.

This is a great problem to have!

Carryover grass may seem like a waste to some, but in all reality, stockpiled forages are a great tool to either extend the fall grazing season, or kick off your spring grazing season earlier than usual. The best part - grass is one of the least expensive costs on most ranches!

The largest expense on most of our ranches is winter feed. So anything that we can do to shorten the amount of time that we are packing feed out to our cows is going to help the bottom line.

A typical winter feeding timeline is 200 days, or approximately November 1st - May 20th. In a year

like this year with a fair bit of stockpiled grass, we can save a lot of expenses by having the cows out an extra couple weeks in the fall, having them out a couple weeks earlier in the spring, or a balance between the two.



Lets have a quick look at the potential cost savings of having animals out on stockpiled grass for an extra 3 weeks. If you are feeding 40 pounds of hay per head per day and hay costs \$0.03 per pound, the cost per head per day is \$1.20 (40 lb. X \$0.03). We must also add in the cost of packing the feed to the cow. Let's assume it costs \$50 per hour to run your tractor and you can feed 100 head in an hour. This works out to 50 cents per head per day (\$50/100hd). Total cost of feeding is now \$1.70 per head per day. (\$1.20 + \$0.50) If we reduce the days on feed by 21 days, our total winter feed savings will be \$35.70 per head (\$1.70 X 21).

For comparison sake, lets relate that to a 600lb calf you are selling in the fall. Your winter feed savings is the same as getting an extra .06

cents per pound out of your calves in the fall. (600lbs x \$0.06 = \$36)

Of course, these are numbers that I pulled from various marketplaces and established benchmarks. Every farm is different, so I encourage you to pop your own numbers into the formulas and figure out the potential cost savings on your farm.

Besides the bottom line, there are many more benefits to leaving stockpiled grass over the winter.

Stockpiled grass is immensely helpful in balancing the water cycle, which helps with drought management. It will also help to boost spring grass growth, and is a great early-season management tool.

Stockpiled grass can help:

- Hold snow, increasing spring moisture.
- Insulates the ground, so the soil does not freeze as hard. This means it will thaw faster in the spring.
- Faster thaw means new grass will begin growing earlier in the spring. This new growth is also insulated from early season frosts, protected by last year's grass.
- Keeping a living root in the soil and keeping the soil covered helps to protect and feed our soil microbes. These microbes in turn help improve soil structure and allows the

soil to absorb more spring moisture.

- Provides a clean place to calve out cows if you are calving in April or May.

I am focusing a lot on the spring time benefits of stockpiled forage, but if you would like to learn more about fall grazing stockpiled grass, please be sure to check out our Extending the Grazing Season Tour coming up on October 8th north of Valleyview! We will be touring 3 ranches in the area, two of which are extending the grazing season with stockpiled forages. Check out the poster below, or call Johanna at 780-523-4033 for more information and to register!



A Peace Country Beef & Forage Association Local Learning Tour:

EXTENDING THE GRAZING SEASON TOUR

Thursday, October 8, 2020
Registration: 9:30am, Tour Begins: 10:00 am
Tour begins North of Valleyview,
at Roland & Faye Calliou Ranch
Check website or call for directions

Tour To Include:	Cost:
• Presentations from forage specialist & grazer Andrea Hanson	\$15/Member
• Tour to include 3 stops: innovative fall grazing of annuals & perennials & high legume grazing	\$20 Non Member
	\$25/Member Pair
	\$35/ Non Member Pair

Bagged lunch included, masks are mandatory & will be provided, bring your own chair

For more information or to register:
780-523-4033 | info@pcbfa.ca | peacecountrybeef.ca





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Beef Ration Rules of Thumb



By: Katie McLachlan

We have had a very busy month receiving and shipping feed samples and returning test results to producers across the Peace. Once you get your feed test results, you may be wondering - what the heck does this all mean?



When reading your feed test, look at the “Dry Matter” values, these values have the moisture of the feed factored out, so you can compare feed types for nutritional quality, from silage to hay to grain. Dry matter is what actually fills a cow up and satisfies her hunger. A good target dry matter intake (DMI) is around 2.5% - 2.7% of a cow’s body weight. So for a 1,400 lb cow, she needs to consume approximately 36.5 lbs of dry matter per day. Assuming her diet is mainly dry hay, with a dry matter percentage of 87% (13% moisture), then she will need to eat 42 lbs of hay per day to satisfy her hunger.

Moving on from satisfying her hunger, we need to ensure she is getting the nutrition she needs to maintain her body condition through the winter and be productive. The most important numbers to look at on your feed test when feeding beef cattle are Crude Protein (CP) and Total Digestible Nutrients (TDN). These values will tell you the protein and energy levels of your feed, respectively. We look to TDN for energy requirements as it is the measurement that is most commonly tested for by various feed testing labs. Following

is a handy table breaking out the needs of a pregnant cow at different points through gestation (pregnancy). Sticking close to these numbers for a pregnant cow should get you through the winter.

Beef Cow Ration Rules of Thumb		
Animal Type	Energy (TDN)	Protein (CP)
Cow - Mid Gestation	55%	7%
Cow - Late Gestation	60%	9%
Cow- Lactation	65%	11%

If you are backgrounding or feeding calves, CP, TDN, and DMI needs change, as calves are still growing. Dry matter intake for growing calves should be in the 2.5-3% of body weight range. Crude protein needs fluctuate with how close to maturity calves are as they utilize protein to grow. TDN values are also fluid depending on your target daily gain. The chart below outlines approximate crude protein and energy requirements of feeder calves.

Feeder Calf Ration Rules of Thumb	
Calf Weight	Protein (CP)
500-800 lbs	14%
800-1050 lbs	12%
1050-Finish	10%
Target Daily Gain	Energy (TDN)
1.5 lbs/day	63-66%
2 lbs/day	66-71%
2.5 lbs/day	73-78%
3 lbs/day	78-83%

Another important aspect of your feed test is the Calcium to Phosphorus Ratio (Ca:P) and minerals like magnesium (Mg) and potassium (K) are also worth looking at. Your Ca:P ratio should be between 2:1 and 7:1. Ideally closer to 2:1. Ca:P and other mineral requirements can be addressed

by using commercial mineral packages or by blending feed. For mature cows, it is recommended that they receive approximately 0.1 lbs/day of supplement before calving and about 0.15 lbs/day postpartum. Feeder calves require approximately 0.1 lbs/day on average.

Weather conditions can also affect an animal's feed requirements. Monitoring body condition during the winter months is very important, with decreasing temperatures, and advancing pregnancy, the energy in the feed we provide is used up first by the cow to keep herself warm, then by the growing calf, and finally into her body condition.

In general, a good rule of thumb to remember is for every degree drop below -20°C , a cow's energy requirements increase by 2%. For example, for a cow in mid gestation during a week of -25°C , will require not the recommended 55% TDN, but actually 65% TDN to maintain her body condition.

Reminder that with your membership to PCBFA, you get 2 free feed samples! We will send out tests over and above your free samples at a cost of \$30/hay & \$42/silage sample. We have feed probes available for member use as well, give us a call at your nearest office to book a feed probe!

Event	Date & Time	Location
Extended Grazing Tour	October 8th	Valleyview
Pasture Rejuvenation Webinar Series Part 1 with Dr. Bart Lardner	October 26th 7-8 pm	Online
Pasture Rejuvenation Webinar Series Part 2 with Dr. Akim Omokanye	November 9th Noon-1 pm	Online

For More Information & to Register:
Visit peacecountrybeef.ca/upcoming-events or Call 780-523-4033

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Contact Our Team!

Chelsey Hostettler Interim General Manager Fairview, AB P: 780-835-6799 C: 780-523-0443 E: chelsey@pcbfa.ca	Akim Omokanye Research Coordinator Fairview, AB P: 780-835-6799 C: 780-835-1112 E: akim@pcbfa.ca	Buthaina Al-Maqtari Research Technician Fairview, AB P: 780-835-6799 C: 403-667-2219 E: buthaina@pcbfa.ca	Katie McLachlan Environmental & Communications Coordinator Fairview, AB P: 780-835-6799 C: 780-772-0277 E: katie@pcbfa.ca	Johanna Murray Extension Coordinator High Prairie, AB C: 780-523-4033 E: johanna@pcbfa.ca	Monika Benoit Extension Program Advisor High Prairie, AB C: 780-837-4752 E: monika@pcbfa.ca
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