

BEECHER

Cows & distillers Page 30 • Biosecurity tips Page 56

Young In Ag

Challenges facing the next generation

RANCH

Five places to save

and spend

Page 38

HEALTH

Weather

extremes

from '08

Page 44

LAND

Pasture

values

cooling

Page 72



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PLUS
10 Winter
Feeding Tips



5 Places To Save Places To Spend

Two beef production specialists offer some tips on how to make this winter easier on the pocketbooks of cattle ranchers.

By Clint Peck

Like never before, ranchers are faced with increasing costs of production, and it's causing many of them to rethink their production strategies. But, as they look ahead to winter herd management, cutting costs just for cost-cutting sake may not be the best approach.

Ron Gill, Texas Agrilife Extension livestock specialist, and John Paterson, Montana State University Extension beef specialist, were asked to take a look at places to save and spend money this winter.

Five places to save

Cut hay waste. Paterson says to look at your operation from "30,000 ft." to determine how much hay is being wasted, and where. He says large, round hay bale management systems often lead to the greatest and most consistent losses – possibly more than 25% of its feeding value.

"Minimizing hay loss begins with dense and well-formed bales and storing them on a well-drained site," Paterson says. "Research shows site selection is more important than row orientation in cutting hay waste."

Deterioration at the bottom of bales stored on damp soil can be substantial. If round bales are stored individually, leave at least 18 in. between bales for air circulation.



- **5 places to SAVE**
- Cut hay waste
- Feed more crop residue
- Weigh and sort cows
- Body condition scoring
- Supplementation strategies

Storing bales with the rounded sides touching is not recommended because this creates a trap for rain and snow. While it makes bales a bit harder to handle with equipment, losses will be higher if the round bales are stacked tightly end to end.

And, Paterson says, make sure you know the true feed weight of the bales you're feeding. "You're headed for a wreck if you think your bales weigh 1,000 lbs., and they really weigh 800."

Feed more crop residue. In many parts of the country, straw is an overlooked feed resource – especially for cows in early gestation. Consider using wheat or barley straw at about 75% of the ration on an as-fed basis with 25% alfalfa hay through the second trimester of gestation.

"Save the good alfalfa hay for when you need it most – just before, during and after the calving season," Paterson says. "The same can be said for corn stover. Once the crop is harvested, half the feed energy remains in the field. Most cornfields will provide 1-2 months of grazing/cow/acre.

However, any time straw is fed or crop residues are grazed, cows should be monitored closely and body condition scores (BCS) recorded, so that necessary supplementary can take place when required.

Long-stem straw has a very low digestibility, and grinding of straw increases consumption. This leads to higher digestible energy intakes and added cost, which needs to be penciled out.

Weigh and sort your cows. Take the time to get to know your cowherd better by sorting them into feeding groups. Cows need to consume forage at the rate of 2-3% of their body weight to have a chance of maintaining performance. Dry beef cows will need a diet that is 8% protein in the middle third of pregnancy and 9% protein in the last



Ron Gill



John Paterson

The benefits from supplementation can be enhanced when supplemental feeding is started before the onset of cold weather. It is easier to alter cow BCS during mild, fall weather than during harsh, winter weather.

Five places to spend

Mineral supplementation. Paterson and Gill agree that in each of their regions, mineral supplementation should be considered an investment in herd productivity. Calcium, phosphorus and salt are likely to be the most limiting macro minerals in cattle diets. "Don't stop supplementing phosphorus," Gill stresses. "Phosphorus has a major impact on reproductive performance." Cattle are more likely to be phosphorus-deficient during the winter, when they often subsist on dry forages. Concentrates contain moderate to high concentrations of phosphorus. Paterson says that while there may be times of the year protein or energy supplements may not be necessary, there is self-domesticate when mineral supplementation isn't necessary.

Forage analysis. Paterson recommends one of the first places to spend money is on a forage analysis by a commercial laboratory to help a ranch-

- **5 places to SPEND**
- **Mineral supplementation**
- **Forage analysis**
- **Pregnancy testing**
- **Implants and ionophores**
- **Herd biosecurity**



er design a feeding program that will economically meet the requirements of the cow herd. This should include evaluation of the protein, energy and mineral composition of forages – whether from range, pastures or hay. The most useful analysis reports for hay supplies should be based on a representative sample from each "lot" of hay – hay from one field that has been cut, handled, baled and stored under uniform conditions.

Interpreting forage analysis reports is a two-part process,

third, pregnant yearling heifers require at least an 11-12% protein diet, while heifers and cows nursing calves need a diet that contains at least 12% protein.

Paterson says surveys show ranchers tend to underestimate the weight of their cows by as much as 20%. "This makes a huge difference when you're feeding a herd that averages 1,450 lbs/cow vs. what you think might be 1,200 lbs/cow."

He also says overfeeding heifers can cost money. In most instances, heifers need to gain 1-1½ lbs/day from weaning to the start of the breeding season. They only need to be 60% of mature body weight going into the breeding season and 85% of mature weight when they calve as a two-year old.

Body condition scoring. Learn how to BCS your cows. Body condition should be evaluated and recorded three times annually: at weaning, 60-90 days before calving and at calving. By assigning BCS scores at the time of weaning, the cows can be sorted for appropriate feeding.

Manage nutrition to prevent middle-aged cows from dropping below BCS 4 during the production cycle, Gill says. Younger cows should be held at about BCS 5. He adds that money can be saved, especially during a drought, by culling lower BCS cows early and allowing the rest of the herd to maintain body condition on standing forage.

Altering body condition takes time. One body condition score is equal to about 60-80 lbs. of bodyweight in small- to moderate-frame cows. Large-frame cows require 100-150 lbs. of body weight to change a single condition score.

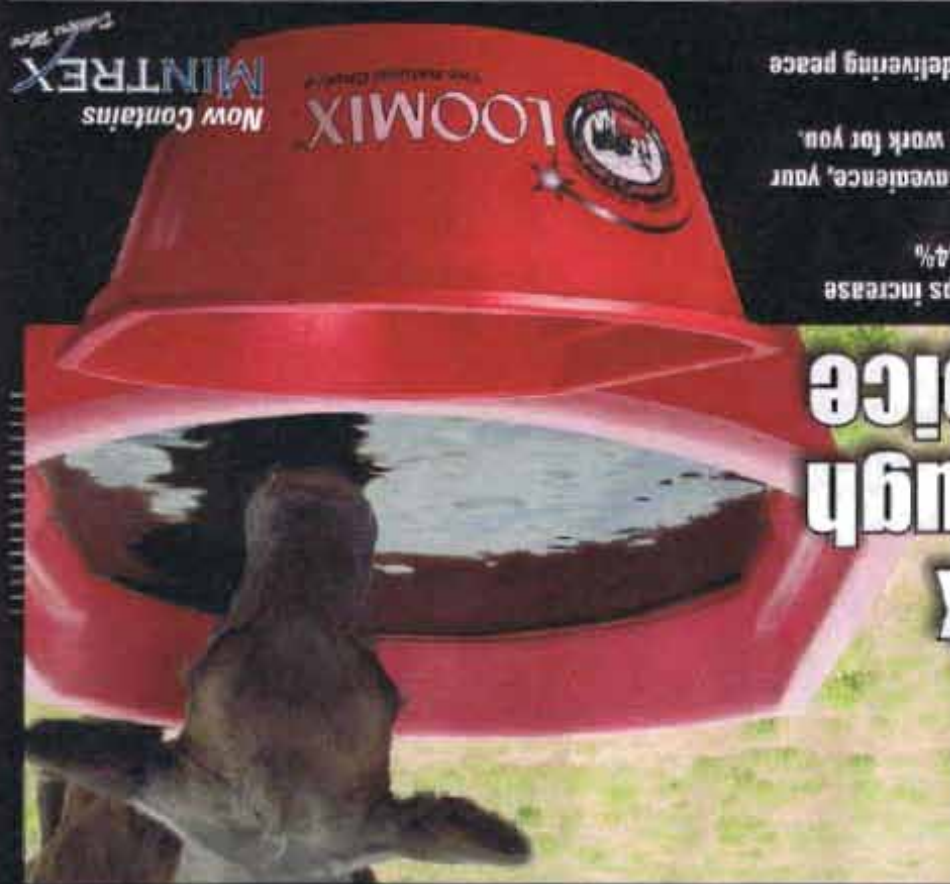
Strategic supplementation. Paterson says protein and/or energy is often supplemented because it makes the rancher feel good. "But this may not be the best strategy for the cow – and for herd profitability," he says. "We need ranchers to hunker down with a calculator and begin assessing the costs of supplementation on a cost/lb. basis for both protein and energy.

High-concentration protein supplements that are natural protein sources don't need to be fed every day. "It might be advantageous, for example, to feed 1 lb. of a 40% protein vs. 2 lbs. of a 20% protein, saving delivery time and fuel," Paterson explains.

Understand the nutrient requirements of your animals to get a feel for what you need to supplement with and when. Underestimating forage nutritive value will lead to over-supple-

mentation, Gill says.



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verages 20-30 lbs./head. But, he adds, implanting must be done

Gill says added gain through the use of growth implants av-

and increases feed efficiency."

and ionophores in cattle decreases the feed needed for growth

"This is a good place to spend, as it's one of the best ways to

gain production efficiency," Paterson says. "The use of implants

is one of the most cost-effective methods of enhancing cattle gain

and efficiency of gain."

Implants and ionophores. Using growth-promoting implants

help identify disease-related fertility problems.

"Additionally, identifying non-pregnant females can

this fall," he says. "I advise all herds get pregnancy tested

smaller herds," he says. "I advise all herds get pregnancy tested

"Pregnancy testing is often overlooked by producers with

many diagnoses in their cowherd.

indicates that fewer than 20% of beef producers utilize preg-

The National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS)

nearly \$80/cow.

in Oklahoma shows the average value of pregnancy testing is

can pay off. Paterson says research from the Noble Foundation

parturition or blood-testing, post-weaning pregnancy testing

tally increase wintering costs. Whether through ultrasound,

heifer - or even an extremely late-calving cow - can substan-

Pregnancy testing. The cost of wintering an open cow or

lots ability to produce a desired level of animal performance.

ogy and meaning of the report. The next step is to evaluate each

Paterson adds. "The first step is understanding the basic terminal-

Clint Peck is director of Montana Beef Quality Assurance with

Montana State University.

venting disease always pays off." ■

make," Paterson says. "Money spent on herd health and pre-

bovine viral diarrhea virus as a component of herd biosecurity

"We've shown in Montana that whole-herd screening for the

diseases, nutrition and animal movement and handling.

include vaccination for common diseases, strategic screening for

Herd biosecurity has many components, Paterson says. These

consultation with an attending veterinarian.

by increased operating costs. Parasite control, including atten-

tion to heel flies, horn flies, etc., should be considered through

and prevent diseases will only compound the problems caused

Herd biosecurity. Failure to address potential disease threats

efficiency and gain.

before implants or ionophores can positively influence feed ef-

option. And, Paterson says cattle must have adequate nutrition

Of course, if cattle are being raised for entry into a "natural"

less critical than the decision on whether to implant," Gill adds.

"Many implants are available, but selection of an implant is

for calves and animals' life stage.

a strategic decision based on the sex of the calves, the market

correctly by experienced producers. Implanting should also be