



A NEWSLETTER OF DAKOTALAND FEEDS

Planning Your Work & Working Your Plan

Mother Nature has yet to make the decision to let the rains start coming. In the meantime, we'd better get our plans in place so we can plan our work and work our plan.

Looking at stocking rates is the obvious first step for cow-calf or stocker operations. This means taking a look at what we expect our forage inventory and growth to be and how many animal units we can sustain on each pasture that we have. Putting off hauling cows to grass can help allow some grass to get enough growth that they get better root development and will then be able to recover from grazing better. The more root development that we have, the more plants can pull moisture from deeper in the soil profile, helping sustain growth through the season.

Creep feeding deserves serious consideration this year, regardless of your moisture situation. In 2014, a demonstration trial showed calves that had creep feed gained 87 pounds more than calves that did not over 73 days. The calves' average consumption was 5.4 lbs of creep per day, and so it should cost us around \$60 to creep feed a calf this year. Whatever you think is a fair price slide, the point is that we would expect 87 lbs of calf to be worth more than \$60.

If it is dry, for every 1 lb of creep feed that a calf consumes, we expect to save about 2/3 of a pound of forage for the cow or to extend the grazing season. It's not huge, and we can't save our entire pasture that way, but we can at least move things in a positive direction by creep feeding.

In dry situations, early weaning is the best practice you can apply. Early weaning calves at 90-120 days of age drops the cow's nutrient requirements drastically, and then poor quality forage (CRP, dry grass pasture, etc) can sustain her in good body condition. The total amount she needs also drops. Supplementation might still be necessary, and if it is, adding Rumensin to your supplement for the cows can help us drop her voluntary intake further by 8-10% while maintaining body condition and pregnancy status. You can supplement with protein and/or Rumensin 3 times per week and still get the benefits.

Protein supplementation may still be necessary after early weaning because we typically need to be around 6.5% protein for an early to mid-gestation cow, and if the grass is dry, protein may be as low as 5%. That leaves a gap we still need to fill. We can use cubes or tubs to help fill the protein gap. The added protein helps rumen microbes digest low-quality forage, so it is an important nutritional gap to fill. We generally do not recommend free-choice liquid because intake of those products is dependent on forage quality and forage quantity, neither of which is great during a dry year. Intakes can get too high and cause urea toxicity, adding pain to an already difficult situation. We can control consumption better with tubs and cubes without that risk. Accuration® Hi-fat tubs allow us to do energy supplementation in a manner that intakes will adjust with grass quality. As intakes get higher, it will be a good indicator that we need to get cows off grass.

Early weaning requires some adjustments to your vaccination protocols to make sure that these younger calves are protected from respiratory disease and clostridial diseases. Ration adjustments also need to be made to meet the higher protein requirement of lighter calves, and distillers grains can help us fill that need without the bloat risk of alfalfa. Energy may also be increased to compensate for their low intake. Stress Care starter is a must for early weaned calves. We want to have a Stress Care product in the bunk and also have Stress Tubs placed in the pens. The Stress Tubs should be placed along the fence near the water source. As calves walk the fences, they will run into the tubs and lick on them a little, supplying them with high-quality nutrients like the Zinpro® trace minerals. It will also help stimulate saliva production, which can help drive feed intake.

Should drylotting cows be necessary for you, we can develop feeding plans for pairs, short-term cows, or cows to finish. With poor quality hay, we can get cows to clean up a lot of that roughage with distillers grains and supply high-quality protein and energy at the same time. If you are running short on silage, it also allows us to bring moisture into the ration to help hold it together.

In a Nutshell:

- **Cattle herd is historically low**
- **Carcass weights are historically high**
- **Demand has been very strong**
- **There is a lot at risk every day, and volatility is huge**
- **Use risk management tools like puts, hedges, LRP**
- **Having a risk management plan is vitally important**

Hopefully the faucet gets turned on and we don't need to worry about early weaning or protein supplementation for the cows, but should the pattern continue, the best thing we can do is have a plan on how to deal with it. Having that plan takes a lot of worry off your plate. When there is so much to be done, knowing your priorities and how you will approach situations can make a big difference. Will plans change? Probably. Then you know how you will adjust your plan instead of making a completely new one. Work your plan so you can plan your work.

Roxanne Knock, PhD

What do you need to be thinking about this time of year?

- Get your creep feeders in shape to put out in pastures and *get creep feed out for spring-born calves*
- Keep mineral in place for the cows on pasture
- Get Clarifly® or Altosid® in your feed to control fly populations
- Implant calves at branding time
- Get prepared for heat stress for cattle in the lots—shades, sprinklers, extra water tanks, etc.
- Ask about Intense Calf WSC mixer for orphaned calves
- Order wasps for feedlot fly control or ask about Clarifly® for feed-through fly control in the feedlot
- Make sure the bulls have mineral, too! Stress Tubs or Ultimate Breeder® mineral provide the Availa-4® mineral
- Have a breeding soundness exam and semen test done on your bulls to help ensure high pregnancy rates
- Watch for signs of anaplasmosis in your herd- older cows are typically more affected

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