



Winter Cow Costs for 2008-9

Due to increases in feed, fuel and fertilizer, many producers have not made a decision on how they will winter cows. Further, many ranches have had damaged all over the state due to hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Generally speaking, winter annuals planted in a prepared seedbed or sod-seeded are a popular choice for cattlemen. However, costs of planting have certainly sparked hesitation. Thus, the purpose of this factsheet is to estimate least cost scenarios for the 2008-2009 winter comparing winter pasture.

Coming out of summer into the fall, most cows will be in either the gestation or pre-calving phases of production. One of the most common errors made relative to nutrition programs is over or underfeeding certain nutrients during the production cycle. The two primary supplements producers should be concerned with are supplying enough protein to meet microbial protein requirements or feeding a high energy supplement to ensure the cow is consuming enough total calories to meet her energy requirements. In order to properly ascertain when and what to supplement, forage testing is paramount. During the pre-calving production cycle, if you are in a winter calving system, protein supplements should be offered when forage crude protein drops below 7-8% and total digestible nutrients (TDN) is below 50%. In a summary of supplementing cottonseed meal to gestating cows at Rosepine Research Station, only when cows were supplemented 3 lbs of meal with low quality hay, did cows maintain body condition while gaining the weight of the fetus. The Beef NRC lists cottonseed meal as having 45.6 % protein. Therefore, the cows are receiving approximately 1.5 lbs of protein in the supplement daily. Other supplements that could be considered are soybean meal, dried distiller's grains (this product has less protein and thus 5-6 lbs must be supplemented daily to reach 1.5 pounds of net protein) and lick tanks, high protein cubes or tubs that can supply modest levels of protein daily. Table 1 documents the current economics of protein supplementation during the precalving or gestation phases of production.

Table 1. Pre Calving Supplement Costs

Product	Cost of Product \$	Amt Fed /Day	Lbs protein fed/day	Cost of protein/lb	Cost/Day
Distiller's grains	200/ton	5 lbs	1.4	\$0.35	\$0.50
Corn Gluten Feed	190/ton	5 lbs	1.15	\$0.41	\$0.47
35% Liquid Feed	2.30/gallon	2 lbs	0.70	\$0.15	\$0.41
20% Cube	396/ton	3 lbs	0.60	\$0.99	\$0.59
28% Tub, 225 lb	800/ton	1 lb	0.28	\$1.43	\$0.40

Once the cow calves and she enters the postpartum phase, nutrient requirements rise dramatically and energy, then, becomes the nutrient most apt to be deficient. Certainly, a high-quality winter annual is the norm for most Louisiana producers. Table 2 estimates winter pasture costs for 2008-09.

Table 2. Estimated Per Acre Costs Associated with Prepared Seedbed Ryegrass Pasture

Item	Costs Per Acre
Seed (50 lbs @ \$0.50 per pound)	\$25.00
Fertilizer (101 lbs N @ \$1.00, 29 lbs P @ \$1.30, 35 lbs K @ \$1.00)	\$173.70
Repair/Maintenance	\$2.52
Fuel	\$8.48
Labor	\$4.90
Interest on Operating Capital	\$7.78
Total Direct Expenses	\$222.38
Total Fixed Expenses	\$8.51
Total Costs	\$230.89

** Information is derived from 2008 LSU AgCenter Enterprise Budgets. Assumptions regarding fuel, fertilizer, and seed costs were updated to reflect current conditions. Fuel was set at \$4.30 per gallon and labor at \$9.60 per hour.

Obviously, a \$230.89 cost per acre is steep, and if grazing 1 cow/calf pair per acre, would translate to a \$1.92/day/pair cost which is not economical. Thus the pasture must be highly managed in order to lower winter costs. Another option is to only allow cows to graze a portion of the day. This method uses ryegrass as a supplement versus continuous pasture. We will still graze the cows for 120 days, however in this scenario, each cow-calf pair is only allowed to graze for 2 hours/day. Cattle can be placed in a dry lot or pasture, and supplied hay for the remainder of the period. This method will definitely cheapen your costs per cow-calf pair. Please keep in mind, however, the estimated costs provided in Table 2 were limited to major expense items associated with establishment of ryegrass pasture. They do not include costs for hay feeding. As with any nutrition program there is risk that must be assumed. Ryegrass establishment could be affected by blast, army worms and non suitable growing temperatures. Secondly, the LSU AgCenter has received many calls in regards to establishing ryegrass on saltwater soaked pastures. Few grass species are tolerant to high concentrations of salt in water and the soil. Bermudagrass is highly tolerant; however, annual ryegrass is more susceptible. Specifically, higher concentrations of salt interfere with seed germination and water uptake. Post Hurricane Rita, producers actually had success, though, planting ryegrass in pastures that did occur flooding. Contact your county agent when deciding to plant winter pasture in areas that incurred flooding.

Another wintering option is to utilize supplement feed with hay. Table 3 looks at the economics of this program on a daily basis.

Table 3 prices are estimates based on October 1st. First, distiller's grain, corn gluten and soybean hulls can be fed at more than 5/lb daily while whole cottonseed and rice bran's limitations are at 5/lbs per day. As nutrient requirements increase, 5 lbs daily of the byproducts with hay may not be adequate to meet lactation requirements, thus body condition must be monitored closely.

Table 3. Daily Winter Costs Using Byproduct feed and Hay

Feedstuff	Cost/ton	Estimated Hay Cost/Day	5 Lbs Fed/Day	Combined Cost/Day
Distillers Grain	\$ 200	\$0.60	\$0.50	\$1.10
Corn Gluten	\$ 190	\$0.60	\$0.48	\$1.08
Cottonseed	\$ 400	\$0.60	\$1.00	\$1.60
Soybean Hulls	\$ 195	\$0.60	\$0.49	\$0.98
Rice Bran	\$ 95	\$0.60	\$0.24	\$0.48

Comparing limit fed ryegrass vs byproduct and hay scenarios, both are similar with regards to cost. The advantage of ryegrass is, if managed correctly, it should provide the most nutritious dry matter and also eliminates the need of handling bulk feed. Alternatively, byproducts are a sure bet and low risk when it comes to ensuring you will have adequate nutrition throughout the winter. Either way, winter feeding will be the most expensive on record and producers can not afford to mismanage the 2008-9 winter. Remember, if the cows are not in adequate body condition, they will not rebreed and mismanagement now could lead to years of economic loss.