



Bayou BEEF TIPS



Winter Hazards for Louisiana Beef Cattle Part II. Solutions

Christine Navarre, Extension Veterinarian, LSU AgCenter
Jason Rowntree, Extension Beef Specialist, LSU AgCenter
Stuart Gardner, Range Management Specialist, USDA-NRCS

Nutrition

Proper nutrition will prevent many diseases in cattle. This starts with knowing the nutrient content of what is available, so what is lacking can be supplemented. Grass hay will be the mainstay of most winter diets this year. Hay can vary greatly in quality, so obtaining an accurate hay analysis is critical. Once the protein and energy content of the hay is known, the type and amount of protein and energy supplements needed can be determined.

Some supplements that are compatible with forage-based diets are soybean hull pellets, soybean meal, cotton seed meal, whole cotton seed, corn gluten feed and rice bran. Corn and other cereal grains can also be used as supplements. Each of these supplements has its advantages and disadvantages, and some have limits to the amounts cattle can safely consume. The exact amount and method of feeding depend on the nutrient content of the hay and the particular supplement being fed. Producers should get specific recommendations from their local livestock extension agents or nutritionists so an appropriate and economical ration can be developed and mistakes can be avoided.

Free choice trace mineralized loose salt (preferred over blocks) should be

available. Limestone or di-calcium phosphate can be added if calcium and phosphorus levels are inadequate. Remember that total amounts of minerals are as important as ratios. A diet can have a normal ratio of calcium and phosphorus, but still be deficient in both. Since intake of trace mineralized salt may decrease in the winter, a mineral and vitamin supplement should be added into the feed supplement when possible. Note that vitamins added to feed and mineral supplements may degrade when stored for prolonged periods.

Body Condition Scoring

Learn how to body condition score cattle. Learn to tell the difference between a cow that has adequate fat stores and one that has a large rumen filled with indigestible hay. Cows should calve in body condition 5-6. Break the herd into categories: too thin (BCS 4 or less); adequate (BCS of 5-7); and too fat (BCS of 8 or 9). At a minimum, herd managers should implement measures to address nutritional deficiencies as body condition approaches a low 5 (no evidence of external fat in brisket and tailhead, the 12th and 13th ribs are obvious, and the bones in the loin area are visible. Once every two weeks during the winter, examine cattle carefully and determine what percentage of the cows are in each category. If the percentage of cattle in

the too thin category is increasing during the third trimester of gestation and early lactation, nutrition is inadequate and adjustments should be made.

Shelter

Shelter in the way of access to a barn or other building with a solid side on the north or simply access to a wooded or hilly area can provide a good windbreak for cattle. Temporary shelter can be provided by assembling a 3- or 4-high stack of round bales across from a perimeter fence to block the cold northern or northwestern wind. Temporary shelter can also be provided by attaching tarps to panels or a constructed frame to block the chilling winds.

Parasite Control

A parasite control program should be instituted. Since each operation is different in management and goals, a parasite control program should be tailored to the operation. Contact your local veterinarian for specific recommendations on parasite control.

For more information on nutrition, reproduction, body condition scoring beef cattle and other beef cattle topics, contact your local extension agent and go to www.lsuagcenter.com.