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Monitoring Feed Intake



Although spring weather may not have extreme hot and cold temperatures, quick changes and variation of temperatures, plus wind, rain and mud, can alter cattle feed consumption patterns.

Beef cattle experts recommend close monitoring of feed intake and maintaining daily feed records. These are crucial to bunk management and keeping cattle performing efficiently.

Extension feedlot experts at Ohio State University recommend that your feedlot cattle should always be eating fresh, high-quality feed no matter what the conditions.¹ They suggest the following to help you monitor feed intake and reach this goal:

Scoring system

Use a feedbunk-scoring system on a scale from zero to five. A score of zero implies that the feedbunk is empty. A score of zero-minus (0-) means the bunk has been empty for more than an hour. Zero-plus (0+) means the bunk is empty except for a few fines or clumps of feed. A score of 1 means less than an inch of feed is left in the bottom of the bunk. A score of 2 means 2 inches of feed is left. A score of 3 means three inches and so on.

If the score is zero for two consecutive days, increase feed delivered to cattle by 5 to 10 percent. If the score is 2 or more, reduce feed offered by 5 to 10 percent.

On the bunk sheet record the date, pen of cattle, amount of feed delivered and a bunk score. A feeder should have at least four days of records whenever determining how much feed to put in the bunk.

The bunk score, combined with the amount of feed provided, can tell you if intakes are going up, coming down or holding steady. Scores constantly in the 2 to 3 range may lead to feed wastage and reduced feed efficiency.

Cattle Monitoring

- **Observation**—Look at the cattle when making a feed decision. If the bunk is empty, determine if cattle look hungry or content? If they look content, wait for a second or third day of empty bunks before increasing the amount of feed.
- **Manure**—Tall firm stools are a sign cattle are consuming significant levels of roughage. Flat brown stools indicate cattle are eating higher amounts of grain but are not having digestive upsets. Flat gray stools, a sign of acidosis, may be observed before an actual drop in intake. Pens with a majority of flat brown stools and a few gray stools are a sign that cattle are optimizing feed intake.

Environmental Monitoring

- **Seasonal variation**—Feeding schedules may need to be changed during different seasons of the year.
- **Weather conditions**—Changing weather can cause erratic intake patterns by cattle. Intake frequently increases prior to a storm, declines during the storm, and increases after the storm.

Feed Monitoring

- **Feed mixing**—If every handful of feed coming out of the bunk is not uniform, cattle are not all on the same diet, creating differences in body condition.
- **Feed accumulation**—Don't allow feed to accumulate from feeding to feeding.
- **Empty bunks**—It is all right for cattle to clean bunks once a day as long as they are not out of feed to the extent they become restless or over eat when fed again.
- **Fines**—Make sure finely ground meals and heavy ingredients such as minerals are not all falling to the bottom of the bunk.
- **Water**—Feed intake is related to water intake. A slow water fountain during hot weather will reduce intake. Clean water fountains on a regular basis.

Land O'Lakes Purina Feed LLC has developed a variety of feeds to optimize feed intake and feed efficiency. Steak Maker® supplements, for example, can be tailored to fit the specific demands of your feedlot operation.

Land O'Lakes beef consultants also can use their proprietary Ration Balancing Program to help you design a feed program specific to your situation. Contact your local cooperative for more information.

¹ <http://beef.osu.edu/library/feedlot/ch3.html>

Nutrition is Critical for Preconditioning

Thinking about developing and implementing a calf preconditioning program?

Nutrition is a critical component of any successful preconditioning program, according to Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service livestock specialists.¹

Performance during the preconditioning, stocker, and feeding phases begins with nutritional management of the cow before calving and continues through the entire production system, they explain. Preweaning and weaning management, post-weaning nutrition, grazing programs, supplements and mineral nutrition are all important in producing “bullet proof” calves, they say.

It is important for you to define and prioritize your objectives for the nutritional management program. These objectives might include:

- Optimizing condition and health of cattle for the next phase.
- Producing added weight gain at a low cost.
- Marketing home raised feed resources through the preconditioning program.
- Minimizing the risk of digestive disorders and disease during the weaning and preconditioning phase.
- Achieve a specific target weight for the cattle by sale or shipping date.
- Accomplish the above objectives with minimal labor and equipment investment.

You need to be cautious not to over-condition cattle that might be destined for a lower level of nutrition, such as dry wintering on native pasture or hay with minimal supplementation.

In these situations, much of the weight and condition gained during preconditioning will be lost, resulting in poor overall production efficiency.

Cattle buyers with orders for cattle going to this type of situation will not be interested in paying very much for fleshy calves that have been fed to gain more than two pounds per day. On the other hand, if the cattle are more likely to go directly to high quality pasture or a feed yard where a high concentrate ration is fed, a higher rate of gain and increased condition may be justified.

Regardless of your situation, the most important thing you can do for your calves is provide a diet designed to develop frame and muscle. Land O'Lakes products have been researched and formulated to do just that without adding too much fat or condition.

Preconditioning feeds must be highly palatable. Newly weaned calves will be more concerned about the absence of their mothers than eating hay or processed feeds. Feed intake will be low for three to four days, especially if the calves had not been previously exposed to feed in bunks or creep feeders.

Grazing Pasture

Depending upon your situation, the best preconditioning nutrition program might be to turn calves back out on high quality pasture four to seven days after they have been weaned.

Calves should have access to the highest quality pasture available. Remember that forage quality and quantity can vary dramatically, depending on forage species, growing conditions, previous grazing management and season.

If quality pasture is not available, hay coupled with supplementation or concentrate feed programs may be an alternative.

Cattle nutrition experts with your Land O'Lakes Feed cooperative can help you develop the right nutrition program for all production phases of a preconditioning program.

So if your feeding and management program requires a supplement such as Steakmaker® Stresscare, or a complete feed program, Land O'Lakes Feed offers you a wide range of products to match your operation's specific requirements. Cattle nutrition specialists also provide supporting services to help you stay competitive. Contact your local Land O'Lakes Feed cooperative today for more complete information.

¹ <http://pods.dasn.okstate.edu/docshare/dsweb/Get/Document-1957/F-3031web.pdf>

Tips for Controlling Flies in Feedlots and Pastures

Warmer weather almost always guarantees an increase in the number of flies that can adversely affect cattle performance and health. Here are some quick tips to help you control flies in feedlots and pastures:

In Feed Lots

- **Sanitation**—Flies need manure and other materials for laying their eggs. Trampling and scraping manure, removing standing water and cleaning up spilled feed and silage go a long way toward lessening fly problems.
- **Chemical sprays**—Several products are available to supplement sanitation practices. Residual wall sprays last three to four weeks and can be applied to areas where flies rest. Knock-down sprays are a quick but temporary method of fly control.
- **Feed additives**—Remember that the active ingredients are deposited in manure, and that's where they work. They won't control flies developing in other fly breeding materials.

In Pastures

- **Chemical**—Approved chemicals applied by sprays, pour-ons, spot-ons and squirt-ons are effective. Because the active ingredients in these products usually wear off in about 30 days, treatments need to be repeated once a month.
- **Forced-Use**—These methods include back rubbers and dust bags. Cattle need to use these daily for them to work, so place them directly in front of food or water.
- **Feed Additives**—Approved feed additives can control fly larvae developing in cattle manure.
- **Ear tags**—Resistance has become a concern, but ear tags remain a viable option for fly control. Alternate the use of pyrethroid tags with organophosphate tags every other year.
- **Mechanical controls**—Harrowing pastures regularly breaks up manure and kills fly eggs and larvae.

Feedlot Management Tips for Challenging Times

During times of high input costs and uncertain markets, it is particularly important to frequently monitor production as you feed your cattle and to keep good records.

This will enable you to make fast decisions and mid-course corrections as feed costs or cattle prices change, say University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension cattle experts.¹ They offer these tips for what you should be monitoring:

- Cost of gain and breakeven should be continually monitored.
- Inventory analysis should be conducted daily or weekly.
- Feed mixing and weighing of ingredients should be monitored routinely.
- Evaluate cattle feed intake daily.
- Frequently analyze ration bunk samples.
- Measure feed waste and make adjustments when needed.
- Use a computer software program to estimate cattle gain and performance. Previous closeouts and records on cattle from a specific source could be used to estimate future performance.
- Monitor feed purchases monthly for billing or cost of feed adjustments.
- Annually evaluate health management program effectiveness.
- Non-feed costs should be monitored and adjusted annually using feedlot figures.
- Maintain and review your feedlot databases regularly.
- Continually evaluate all aspects of your feedlot enterprise.
- Always keep good records as they are essential to maximizing productivity.

Be sure to ask your Land O'Lakes feed representative about the new Visions™ Feedlot Performance and Cost Monitoring program.

¹ <http://beef.unl.edu/stories/200809301.shtml>

Cattle Need More Than Green Grass

Even though pastures look green and lush in spring and early summer, grass production alone might not be able to meet all your cattle's nutritional needs.

Most grasses are just beginning to grow after being dormant during winter and do not produce enough volume to meet the animals' nutritional requirements.

Spring forage growth can be quite rapid and the plants are utilizing carbohydrates for growth rather than storage.

Beef forage experts suggest that you keep in mind these three things to help keep your pastures productive:

- Match animal requirements with your forage supply.
- Rotate animals to different pastures frequently.
- Try to delay grazing of perennial pastures in the spring if possible.

Even with good management, forage quality naturally declines as the growing season progresses.



Feeding supplements

Feeding supplements is a proven method to improve production efficiency even when forage quality is declining. Among other things, supplementing can provide the needed nutrients—lacking in lower quality forage—that will enable cattle to perform more efficiently in digesting lower quality forage.

This, in turn, helps to increase forage intake and the nutrients available to the animals, resulting in more efficient use of available forage sources and enhanced forage digestibility.

The balanced mineral, protein and energy contained in a quality Land O'Lakes® Feed branded supplement, for example, can improve forage utilization, helping you to receive more value and profit potential from your beef-cattle enterprise.

Land O'Lakes offers a line of supplements, complete feeds and medicated products designed to optimize forage utilization and maximize your return per acre. These products can help you get the most from the forage you provide to your cattle.

Land O'Lakes also offers a range of powerful competitive in the face of today's economic challenges. These flexible programs offer services tailored to your specific needs whether you are a cow-calf producer, a calf backgrounder or feedlot operator.

The cattle nutrition consulting program, for example, includes beef ration balancer software, feedstuff analysis and a complete review of your nutrition program.

Contact your local cooperative handling Land O'Lakes Feed products for complete information on any of these consulting services and Land O'Lakes beef cattle nutrition products.