

Hardee Rancher Beef and Forage Newsletter



Hardee County Extension Service
507 Civic Center Drive
Wauchula, Florida 33873
(863) 773-2164
Fax (863) 773-6861
E-mail Lgary@ifas.ufl.edu

January 2002

- Reducing Winter Feed Costs-

by Lockie Gary, County Extension Director

Florida lags behind the rest of the nation in cattle reproductive rates and weaning weights. However, because of our unique climatic conditions (mild winters) we have an abundance of year-round grazing. In addition we have many by-product feeds and because of our mild weather our facility expense is minimal.

The largest single expense in keeping a beef cow in Florida is her winter feed bill. High-return and low-cost producers minimize the use of purchased feeds which are fed predominately during the winter. The average winter feed bill for a U.S. producer is \$116 per cow per year, compared to \$70 per cow in Florida. Since this figure represents our largest single itemized expense in a cow-calf operation, every effort should be made to reduce it thereby improving profitability.

Factors To Consider To Lower Cow-Calf Production Costs

Production costs differ dramatically among U.S. Cow-calf producers. Current annual data from the Cow-Calf IRM-SPA Report Card production costs range from \$156 to \$969 per breeding cow. These wide differences are due to the enormous variety of inputs, resources, and production and management practices used by cow-calf producers. The following is an itemized list of factors to consider as opportunities to lower your

production costs.

How To Lower Purchased Feed Costs

- Develop a purchasing plan for feed-amount to spend, type of feedstuffs, quantity, quality, etc.
- Minimize the need for the use of purchased feeds.
- Have feed analyzed for nutrient composition.
- Use purchased feeds based on nutritional needs of cow-herd and replacements-lactating, gestating, dry, growing, etc.
- Buy purchased feeds in volume and at seasonal low prices when storage is practical.
- Identify alternative feeds and by-product feedstuffs.
- Compare alternative feed prices and nutrient costs.
- Develop feed rations based on feed and forage analyses.
- Minimize feed losses during storage and feeding.
- Compare alternative feed, storage, and feeding costs.
- Buy feedstuffs by weight and quality (%DM, %TDN, %DP, etc.) instead of bulk measure (bale, roll, trailer load, etc.).
- Use limit-feeding techniques (fat, salt, rolling out hay, etc.) when practical.
- Consider incorporating cool and warm season forages (legumes and grasses) in your grazing plan to reduce dependence on purchased feeds and nitrogen fertilizer.
- Consider whether forage species or forage variety selection can lengthen the grazing season and thus lower purchased feed needs.

How To Lower Raised Feed Costs

- Plan your anticipated raised feed needs (best and worse case scenarios).
- Minimize the use of raised feeds when growing forages is economically advantageous.
- Compare the costs of raising, harvesting, and storing alternative raised feeds.
- Compare your cost of harvesting raised feed with custom harvesting rates.
- Compare your cost of raised feeds with alternative purchased feeds (buy feed if it is cheaper than self raising and harvesting feed).
- Minimize harvest, storage, and feeding losses.
- Consider weather, labor availability, and machinery readiness to minimize harvested feed losses.
- Consider feed storage facilities to minimize feed losses.
- Consider the use of feed panels/rings to minimize feeding losses.
- Borrow, share, and/or rent machinery and labor with neighbors.
- Use limit feeding techniques (rolling out hay, etc.) when practical.

How To Lower Grazing Costs

- Develop a grazing plan to put your inputs, resources, and forages to better use.
- Soil test to determine fertilizer nutrients and/or lime needs.
- Evaluate alternative fertilizer formulation prices and spreading costs to reduce the cost of fertilizers and fertilizing.
- Where possible, incorporate legumes into perennial pastures to lower nitrogen fertilizer costs and improve forage quality.
- Split fertilizer applications if it will minimize fertilizer losses.
- Use non-commercial fertilizer sources (animal wastes, sludge, light industry and mining materials, etc.) when prices and availability permit.
- Consider leasing additional land when lease rates are cheaper than fertilization costs (compare dollars

per AUM or dollars per unit of dry matter forage production).

- Practice weed control (chemical or mechanical) only when it is economically to your advantage.
- Where practical, improve forage use with improved grazing methods (creep, limit, rotational, intensive, etc.).
- Adjust fertilizing and stocking-rate levels based on calf and fertilizer prices (for example, higher fertilizer costs imply lower fertilizer levels which result in lower stocking rates, fewer cows per acre).
- Use crop aftermath and native pasture when possible.
- Consider stockpiling certain forages for use as standing hay if this is possible in your area.
- Consider drilling/overseeding cool-season forages (grasses and legumes) to lengthen the grazing season and reduce your purchased and/or raised feed needs.
- Provide animals with the highest nutritional requirements access to the highest quality pasture, (heifers and young pairs).

For questions or comments regarding this publication contact



[Lockie Gary](#)



Back

[Back to the Cooperative Extension Newsletters Page](#)

Back

[Back to the South Florida Beef-Forage Program HomePage](#)

