

# *Hardee Rancher Beef and Forage Newsletter*



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## **- 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).

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