

Hardee Rancher Beef and Forage Newsletter



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Calendar of Events

June	
2	Perennial Peanut Production Workshop and Field Day - Moultrie, GA
5-7	Forage and Pasture Management School - Sebring
20-23	FCA Annual Convention - Marco Island
July	
10-12	Forage and Pasture Management School - Sebring
August	
14-16	Forage and Pasture Management School - Sebring
September	

6-7	FCA Quarterly Meeting - Deland
October	
11	UF/IFAS Range Cattle REC Field Day - Ona 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

- General Drought Management Concepts -

Forage Type

Florida has been blessed with bahiagrass. Even during drought, bahiagrass can "green up" - it just won't grow very much. Fortunately, if cattle overgraze this forage, a little rain bounces it right back. Hermathria and stargrass are different. If over grazed during drought, these forages could be lost, resulting in costly replanting. Cool season forages, such as ryegrass, are affected by dry conditions more severely than are the warm season grasses. These forages just quit growing. Without irrigation, managing cool season forages in a dry year is difficult. Forage must be available, even if you have to purchase hay. Good management saves forage for the tough times. If you're constantly running out of forage even during the "normal" dry season, you should reevaluate your stocking rate.

Creep Feeding

Drought conditions may be one of the most profitable times to creep feed calves. Potentially heavier weaning weights sure can help. In addition, some recent Florida liquid supplement research showed that creep-feeding calves, from high producing cows, helped increase the cows' conception rates.

Supplemental Feeding

If dry conditions persist causing cattle to lose body condition, aggressive measures should be employed. Hay or some kind of forage must be provided. Supplementing the herd can extend available forage. The mineral and vitamin status of the herd is extremely important during stress events - especially weather stress. Drought is not a good time to cut corners on mineral and vitamin nutrition.

Early Weaning

Cows' nutritional requirements are significantly reduced after weaning. Calves are more efficient on feed rations and eat less than brood cows. It may make economic sense to feed the calf rather than supplement the cow to achieve milk production. Further, bred cows without calves can survive fairly well on rough woods pasture or poor forage. Consequently, your better forage can be targeted for the weaned calves. Weaning and selling calves may not be in your best interest. If so, and your operation lacks pastures to background young calves, then an option may be to send them north or west to grass while retaining ownership.

Smart Herd Reduction

When forage shortage is a problem, another solution is to eliminate the free loaders. Cull open, older and non-productive cows. This leaves your available forage for productive cows and genetically superior replacement heifers. In contrast, another tactic may be to sell heifers and bred young cows if the financial incentives warrant it.

Water Supply

Obviously, during drought water supply (quantity) is a problem. Remember, cattle need a source of good quality, clean, free choice water. Reduced water intake causes a reduction in feed and forage dry matter intake.

Parasite Control

Internal and external parasites increase the nutritional needs of your cattle. Controlling these parasites is necessary for an efficient, healthy herd.

Poisonous Plants

Poisoning most often occurs in over grazed, drought-stressed pastures. Check your pastures for toxic plants, such as Nightshade, Horse Nettle, Castor Bean and Lantana.

Protect from Heat

Heat stress increases your cattle's nutrient needs. Research clearly shows the benefit of shade on productivity. Woods and shaded areas protect animals from direct sunlight. Always provide plenty of fresh, clean water.

Tax and Government Assistance

The government often assists cattlemen in extreme weather areas. Keep your eye out for these programs. At tax time, check with your tax accountant about the tax treatment from income on cattle you were forced to sell due to drought.

Nutritional Management during Drought

It's tough to manage droughts, however you can manage the nutrition of your cattle during droughts. The challenge is to manage nutrition economically. Numerous research reports have documented that the most economical feeding programs during these times are relatively high (i.e. - 30% to 60% of dry matter intake) in concentrates. Molasses, fat, grains, grain by-products, potato processing by-products, citrus pulp, whole cottonseed, bakery by-products and certain poultry litters are among the products relatively high in energy and that available in Florida. Remember, these are "forage stretcher" feedstuffs. That is, they are energy containing feedstuffs that have little or no effective roughage value. Mature cattle will still need at least eight pounds per head per day of some standing forage or hay dry matter to "stretch." Several factors should be considered in choosing which "forage stretchers" are most appropriate for your beef operation:

- Do you have the equipment to properly receive, inventory, mix and feed the product?
- Is the feedstuff compatible with feeding in a self-feeder or must it be fed in bunks or on the ground?
- What is a realistic estimate of inventory shrink and/or waste? What will it cost?
- How rapidly will the feedstuff spoil? And if it does, what are the consequences to your feed budget, cattle health and productivity?
- Is the feedstuff consistent with BMP 's or are you buying someone else's environmental problem and bringing it on your ranch?
- Is there a "safe upper limit" to how much of the product can be fed?
- Is the supplier reliable? Is the supplier capable of and willing to supply you with professional nutrition

assistance?

- Is the feedstuff balanced in nutrients?

The following are some comments, guidelines and cowboy arithmetic to assist you in choosing the supplemental feed(s) that's right for your situation.

1. **Real cost** can be elusive. Calculate the cost per ton of dry matter (DM) delivered to your cows. Example: There is \$20/ton freight on a "free," "wet" product that contains only 18% DM, or 82% moisture. Cost per ton DM = $\$20/0.18 = \111.11 per ton DM. Then, if the cattle waste 20% of the product, your cost per ton DM becomes \$133.33.
2. Limit **fat** from all sources to a maximum of about 5%-6% of the total diet DM, or about one pound per head per day, regardless how "cheap" the fat is.
3. **Molasses** is high in energy. It's easy and inexpensive to self-feed or limit feed, with little waste or inventory shrink. It contains no mycotoxins or toxic levels of other substances. It's readily available and very safe to feed at up to 40% of the diet DM or about eight pounds per head per day.
4. **Grains, grain screenings, hominy, potato by-products and bakery by-products** can be excellent energy sources. They can be especially challenging to feed because of a relatively high risk of problems related to mycotoxins and acidosis. These products are NOT for amateur cattle feeders. From a practical standpoint, limit the use of these products, collectively, to a total of about 30% of the diet DM or six pounds per day.
5. **Citrus pulp** is a good source of energy, and relatively "safe" to feed. You can safely feed up to about 40% of the total diet DM or eight pounds per day IF you pay due respect to mineral balance. Citrus pulp is extremely high in calcium and very low in phosphorus, with a Ca: P ratio usually between 13:1 and 24:1. Do NOT feed high calcium minerals with citrus pulp. Other unique nutritional characteristics are its extremely low content of sulfur, manganese and zinc. Manganese, and especially zinc, are critical to good reproductive efficiency.
6. **Whole cottonseed** can be a good source of protein, energy and roughage. Virtually all the energy in whole cottonseed comes from its high fat content (about 20% fat), Cottonseed contains about 30% hulls. These feedstuffs are highly susceptible to mycotoxin problems and contain varying amounts of gossypol, which decreases reproductive efficiency, especially in bulls. Limit consumption to a maximum of about 25% of the diet DM or up to five pounds per day for cows; weaned heifers three pounds.
7. **Poultry litter** may be an option. Generally avoid feeding layer Sitter (litter from houses of egg-laying hens) because of its extremely high calcium and low protein content relative to broiler litter (litter from houses of meat-type chickens). Broiler litter is usually higher in feed value. Both are EXTREMELY variable in nutrient content. Surveys of broiler litter from Alabama (106 samples) and Georgia (86 samples) showed ash content (mostly dirt) varied from a low of 9% to a high of 69%. TDN obviously varied accordingly. The cost of monitoring quality may offset any savings in feed cost. Let the buyer beware!
8. **Cull fruits, and vegetables** are sometimes available from nearby farmers or processing plants. These kinds of materials are extremely variable in nutrient values. They can also ferment and/or spoil readily. Be sure to consider the true cost of DM from, the standpoint of freight and waste; it may well calculate to no bargain buy.

None of the above mentioned feedstuffs are reliable or significant sources of Vitamin A or Vitamin E. This is

an important consideration because when pastures are in drought, the forage provides insufficient quantities of the vitamins A and E. Therefore, the cattle will need supplemental vitamins. Similarly, each of the above feedstuffs has significant nutrient excesses and or deficiencies. This can lead to trouble if not properly formulated into the feeding program.

Adapted from *Drought Management for Florida Beef Cattle*, U. S. Sugar Corporation

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