

AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES



**GREEN COUNTY
AGRICULTURE NEWS**

**Cooperative
Extension Service**
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Plan To Lower Winter Feed Costs

Winter feeding is probably the single largest expense of maintaining the cow herd. This year will not be an exception due to high input costs (especially grain and concentrates). However, there are several management practices that we can use to lower our feed costs and make our herds more profitable.

The amount of hay and purchased feed needed can be decreased by extending grazing for as long as possible. Pastures that have received nitrogen and been allowed to accumulate growth can be grazed even farther into the winter, thus markedly delaying the start of winter feeding. Accumulated/stockpiled fescue pastures should be strip-grazed to avoid waste and increase grazing days.

Pregnancy check the spring calving cow herd now and eliminate the wintering of open cows – or move them to the fall-calving group. Thin cows that are pregnant can be put on stockpiled pasture as soon as their calves are weaned to regain body condition prior to the winter feeding period. Favorable prices make this a good time to cull unproductive cows.

Calculate the amount of hay that you need to feed the cows through the winter. A rough estimate would be about two percent of their bodyweight for 120 days or so. That would be about 25 lbs daily for 120 days to equal approximately 3,000 lb of hay per cow. Now multiply 3,000 lb by the number of cows that you plan to winter to estimate the amount of hay needed. You might be able to feed less than 120 days but don't count on it, and your round bales of hay probably weigh closer to 1100-1200 lbs rather than the expected 1500 lbs. Obtain forage analyses on your hay supply so that you can estimate your supplemental feed needs. Supplemental feed purchases can be made ahead of time for best prices.

Plan to minimize feed losses. Consider a feeding pad (geotextile fabric and gravel) with hay feeders to minimize mud and waste. Cost share programs may be available for permanent feeding structures. Feed pads or structures will also minimize damage to your pastures during the wet winter months.

Consider lower cost alternative feeds when purchasing supplements. Be aware of the nutrient value of purchased ingredients – things like rice hulls, peanut hulls, cottonseed hulls, etc. may have very little feed value. You should know (based on your forage analyses) if you need protein, energy or both and purchase your feed accordingly.

Cattle should be grouped according to their nutritional needs for winter feeding. There are several distinct management groups in most beef herds:

- Cows nursing calves
- Weanling replacement heifers
- Bred yearling heifers
- Dry, pregnant cows
- Herd bulls

Most herds will have at least three of these groups which will benefit from being managed separately.

Increase feed to cows after calving to get calves off to a good start and to maintain the cows' body condition. Don't let cows lose much condition (flesh) this winter or next year's pregnancy rates will suffer. Calf prices will likely remain high so attempting to save money by underfeeding the cow herd this winter is bad business for the future.

**December
2011**

***The Green County
Cooperative
Extension Office
will be closed for the
Holiday Season
December 26 ~ January 2.***



Happy Holidays!

***If you have any questions
regarding this newsletter or
upcoming activities, please
contact the Green County
Extension Office.***

Brian S. Newman

Brian S. Newman,
County Extension Agent for
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Mulching Strawberry Plants

Hopefully, you had a chance to mulch your strawberry plantings before the early winter cold.

Mulch helps reduce the freezing and thawing of the soil that breaks off the small roots and in some cases can lift the plants partially out of the ground, translating into smaller berries and reduced yields.

Mulching also slows plant development in the spring which reduces the chances of frost injury to the flowers.

Mulch conserves moisture, keeps berries off the ground which reduces rot development and keeps dirt off of the berries. It can also reduce weed development making harvest much nicer under wet conditions.

Wheat straw is the preferred mulch material, but oat and rye straw also work well. Try to acquire mulch that does not contain a lot of weed, wheat, oat or rye seeds as this can substantially increase weed control requirements in the spring. Apply the mulch when the night temperature is expected to reach about 20 degrees F which is usually sometime in mid December in Kentucky, although this year the lower temperatures could come earlier

Cover the plants so you can still see a number of leaves peeking out from beneath the straw. Excessive mulch can smother plants.

When spring comes, don't hurry mulch removal. The mulch will protect the strawberry fruit buds as long as it remains on the plant.

Remove the mulch when the plants have begun to grow and the foliage looks slightly yellow. If the mulch is left on too long, it could reduce some yields.

Mistletoe: Tree Thief, Holiday Tradition

Once autumn leaves have fallen, mistletoe becomes highly visible on large trees throughout Kentucky. Phoradendron, the scientific name for this parasitic plant, means tree thief. You can commonly find these small leafy plants on twigs and branches of many hardwood species in the southern two-thirds of the United States. Mistletoes extract water, mineral elements and food from their host tree by way of a parasite nutrient-uptake organ; hence the name, tree thief.

Mistletoes' use in holiday traditions has roots in pagan times. Its parasitic nature and the fact that it appears to be alive while the host tree appears dead, led some to believe mistletoe mysteriously held the life of the tree during winter. Druids harvested mistletoe in a special rite, never letting the plant touch the ground, then hung it in their homes for good luck.

Our modern-day mistletoe holiday tradition likely originates with a mythological Norse goddess of love and beauty. Frigga, whose son was restored from possible death by mistletoe, was thought to bestow a kiss on anyone walking beneath one. Today, when two people meet under the mistletoe, tradition suggests they must exchange a kiss for good luck.

Phoradendron, the most common mistletoe growing in Kentucky, resembles another species that grows in Europe. It has simple, fleshy green leaves arranged oppositely on the stem. Stems are short and more branched than the host tree, so mistletoe often appears as a spherical bunch of dense vegetation. These bunches may be a foot or two in diameter and are located high in the tree for better sunlight exposure. Mistletoe berries range from white to straw-colored to light red. Birds eat the fruits, reportedly toxic to human and animals, then deposit the seeds onto branches where they germinate and penetrate the host tree.

Since birds tend to roost in open-grown trees, mistletoes do not appear as frequently in forest trees. Generally, they do not cause much damage, although they can be harmful to a tree already under stress. If mistletoe appears on landscape trees or other trees in the urban forest, you can control it through pruning.

The Kentucky Agriculture Water Quality Act

The Agriculture Water Quality Act was passed by the Kentucky Legislature in 1994. It states that landowners with 10 or more acres in agricultural production must develop a water quality plan. If you farm 10 or more acres or plan to harvest trees on 10 or more acres in Kentucky, then you are required by state law to implement an agriculture water quality plan.

This plan documents the best management practices you're using to protect water resources. These best management practices could include planned grazing systems for livestock, filter or buffer strips around crop fields, animal waste storage structures and nutrient management plans. It should also include plans to limit livestock access to streams. In addition, the document should include information about proper handling of herbicides and pesticides and proper maintenance of septic systems.

To implement a water quality plan, first look at the activities in your operation. You can use a web-based planning tool to answer questions about the operation. By answering these questions, you can identify the appropriate best management practices needed. Then, you document that these practices are being used and properly maintained.

In many cases, proper practices are already in place, and creating an agriculture water quality plan provides a document stating that you are doing the right things to protect water quality on your farm.

However, keep in mind that an agriculture water quality plan is not a voluntary document, and the Kentucky Agriculture Water Quality Act has not gone away. Periodically review and update your plans to reflect changes in farming and forestry practices or land ownership. Additionally, a water quality plan is required by the local Soil and Water Conservation District if you plan to apply for state cost share programs.

By implementing an agriculture water quality plan, you help protect both surface and groundwater from agricultural contaminants. Keeping the water resources of the state clean protects human and animal health and reduces the cost of treating drinking water.

Body Condition Scores Good Indicators of Herd Health

Early winter is an optimum time to prepare your spring-calving herd for reproductive success. Adequate nutrition from about 50 to 80 days prior to calving is critical to maximizing a cow's ability to rebreed and maintain a 365-day calving interval. If a cow gets inadequate nutrition or is thin at calving and breeding, she will take longer to come into heat and will require more services to conceive.

The best method to evaluate the nutritional status of your herd is to do body condition scores. A body condition score is an estimate of the degree of body fatness of an animal, which gives us an estimate of the amount of body energy reserves available to the cow. Scores range from 1 to 9, with 1 meaning a cow is emaciated or extremely thin, while a 9 is an animal that is extremely obese. Beef producers should train themselves to identify cows that are too thin, cows that are marginal and cows that have an optimal body condition score for rebreeding. Body condition scoring is a tool to help plan your supplemental feeding program so you can maintain adequate productivity in your herd.

You can determine body condition score by looking at the degree of sharpness or thinness in several areas of the cow's body. The ribs and backbone are two primary regions you need to examine to help establish body condition score. Other important areas are the tailhead, shoulder and brisket regions of the cow. In general, cows with more fat appear smoother in these areas to the point that individual bones are difficult to see.

Cows that are too thin, scores of 3 or less, have easily identifiable fore and rear ribs, sharpness across the backbone, sharpness over the hook and pin bones near the tailhead and sharpness across the shoulders. These cows need to gain approximately 150-200 pounds before calving if you want them to rebreed in a timely fashion.

Cows that are borderline have a body condition score of 4. These cows have easily identifiable 12th and 13th ribs, but their fore ribs are covered. The backbone and hooks and pins are still prominent but are not sharp in appearance. The shoulders are less defined. These cows need to gain about 75 to 100 pounds before breeding season.

Cows that are in optimal body condition have scores of 5 or 6 and have a good overall appearance. No ribs are visible unless the animal has been shrunk. The backbone, hooks and pins appear rounded and not easily seen and the area around the tailhead is filled in but not mounded. These cows simply need to maintain their weight until calving.

Research has shown that cows with scores less than 5 at calving have lower pregnancy rates and take longer to rebreed than cows with scores of 5 or higher. The optimum body condition score for mature cows is a 5 or 6. Heifers that are calving their first calf need to have a score of at least 6 to maximize rebreeding success.

The best way to use body condition scoring is sort cows according to their score at 90-100 days before calving and feed these groups according to their score and nutrient needs to optimize reproduction. Each body condition score typically represents 75 to 100 pounds of body weight. Analyze your feedstuffs so that you can accurately balance rations to meet the needs of each group of cows. This method not only ensures adequate breeding potential of your cowherd, but is also an efficient method of supplying nutrients to your cows.

Upcoming Events

1/5	Green/Taylor Ag. Leadership	6:00 p.m.	@ Taylor Co. Office
1/10	Center of Kentucky Dairy Short Course	TBA	
1/18	Center of Kentucky Dairy Short Course	TBA	
1/19	Home Gardening Class	3:00 p.m.	@ Green Co. Office
1/21	Green Co. Cattlemen's Annual Meeting	6:00 p.m.	@ Green Co. Office
1/24	Center of Kentucky Dairy Short Course Field Trip	TBA	
1/26	Gardening/ Fruit/Brambles	3:00 p.m.	@ Green Co. Office
1/31	Center of Kentucky Dairy Short Course	TBA	

COOPERATIVE
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SERVICE



Cooperative Extension Service

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Peppermint Cheesecake Recipe

Serves: 10

2 pkg. (8 oz. each) 1/3-less-fat cream cheese, softened
1/2 cup sugar
2 eggs
3/4 cup low-fat sour cream
1 tsp. vanilla
1 tsp. peppermint extract
6 drops red food color
1 9-inch reduced-fat graham cracker pie crust
Whipped cream and mini candy canes for garnish (optional)



Preheat the oven to 350°F. In a large bowl, beat the cream cheese and sugar until light and fluffy. Add the eggs and beat well. Add the sour cream and vanilla; mix well. Place 1/2 cup of the mixture in a small bowl and stir in the peppermint extract and food color, mix well. Pour the remaining cream cheese mixture into the pie crust smooth the top. Drop the peppermint mixture by spoonfuls into the mixture in the crust and swirl with a knife to create a marbled effect. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes or until the edges are set. (The center will be slightly loose) allow to cool for 1 hour, then cover and chill for at least 6 hours before serving. Cut into 10 slices. Top each slice with a dollop of whipped cream and a mini-candy cane, if desired.

Serving Size: 1 slice.

Exchanges: 1 1/2 carbohydrate; 1 medium-fat meat; 2 fat Calories: 265; Fat: 14 g; Sodium: 292 mg; Carbohydrate: 25 g; Protein: 8 g.

Source: *Holiday Delights for the Diabetic by Rosie Allen, Gallatin County Extension for Family & Consumer Sciences*