

Monitor Winter Stress To Increase Spring Profits

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The cold temperatures and inclement weather of winter may merely be uncomfortable to you, but they can significantly slow growth progress of your cow herd. More nutrients are required to keep a cow or calf at optimum growth and maintenance levels during this time of year.

Loss of gain as a result of lowered appetite and general sickness can cost a considerable amount of money. But, by closely monitoring winter rations, forages and overall animal health, you can be better assured of a healthy herd entering the spring season.

Dr. John Hough, director of education and research for the American Polled Hereford Association, recommends a thorough review of your herd nutrition requirements. Once you've established what nutrition levels your herd needs, you can make a better-informed decision on what feeds to purchase and precautions to take.

"When beef animals are stressed, their appetite can decrease and their resistance to disease organisms goes down," Hough said. "In addition to extreme weather fluctuations, other stress factors include wean-

ing, processing, shipping, and birthing."

Hough says that one of the most effective ways to keep sickness problems to a minimum is to keep cattle eating properly.

This can be achieved by making sure the cattle are continually checked for illness and fed high-quality, well-balanced rations, with proper nutritional supplements fed in proper amounts.

Having a sufficient supply of feed on hand is critical, especially in areas where snow and ice can delay shipments for several days at a time. Plus, a supply of quality hay is essential for meeting rough-

age requirements.

"It's also important to be certain the groups within your herd are fed the proper rations for related weather conditions," Hough said. "Sorting the herd into groups with similar feed requirements is an important step in developing a cost-effective winter feeding program."

Groups normally seen in today's herd include dry cows, nursing cows with calves, weaning calves, bred and/or open heifers, and bulls.

In everyday practice, these groups don't always need to be fed separately. If the herd isn't large, weaned calves, bred yearlings, first-calf, and the oldest dry cows can be fed together. The ration should be formulated so weaned calves and bred yearling heifers will gain enough to ensure maximum growth and development.

Nursing first-calf heifers and older cows will need to mend somewhat before the next calving and lactation period, Hough said.

"If your herd has a fall calving, split calving or year-around calving, cows nursing calves should be handled or at least fed separately, especially if you use creep-feeding," Hough said.

"You should also be aware of the animal's body condition entering winter," Hough said. "This is very important since it tells us what type of pasture or range the cows have had during the summer and fall grazing periods and has a large effect on the rebreeding rate."

"By knowing the condition of the cattle, it will help you determine what type of feeds and forages your herd will need. Plus, you can better plan for feed needs and search for the best value from your suppliers," he said.

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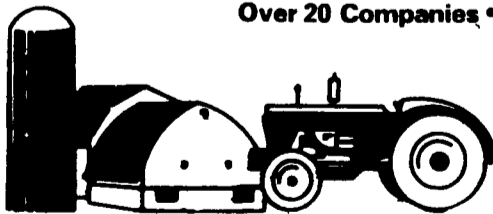
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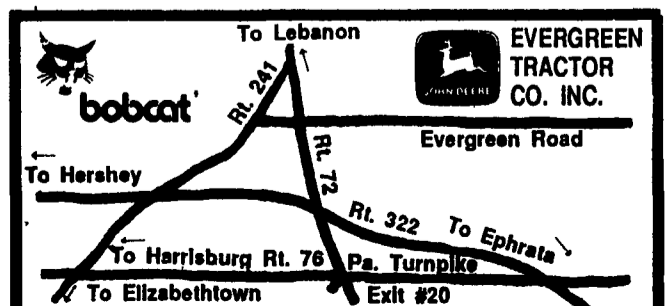
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