

Winter Feeding

By Beth Crandall

With the major drought we have had throughout the last year and many producers having to pull their stock off of summer pasture early, winter feeding is going to be scarce and expensive. Feeding a cow accounts for approximately 50% of the total annual cost to keep that cow and most of that feed cost occurs during the winter months. Let's talk about some of the feeding options that are available in our county.

Grazing Rangelands

Juab county offers some excellent winter grazing options for ranchers, with our lower elevation and variety of forages that grow in the area. Grazing these winter grasses is ideal as they offer low cost, low labor feeding. A few examples of some forages that grow in Juab County and are grazed during the winter and spring months, include; Indian Ricegrass, Wild Rye, Thurber's Needlegrass, and Crested Wheatgrass. Indian Ricegrass is a native Utah species, it grows abundantly in the rangelands of Utah. This grass is drought tolerant and provides an excellent source of nutrition to livestock. Wild Rye is beneficial because it grows tall and can be grazed when other grasses are covered in snow. Though it is not as drought tolerant as other grasses mentioned, it grows well in the spring and more palatable during this time. Thurber's Needlegrass is another native Utah grass that is known to grow on the western slopes in Juab County. It is most palatable in the spring, when new growth is occurring, but cures well and provide adequate winter grazing. Crested Wheatgrass was first introduced to the area in 1906. It offers excellent erosion control, quickly recovers from grazing and easily finds water/nutrients in the soil, making it competitive with weeds. Crested Wheatgrass can also be competitive with native forages, making it undesirable to some. It is best to have a variety of native grasses available for winter and spring grazing. Cattle will naturally consume the grass that provides the most energy and protein at the time that they need it. If multiple forage types are available at all times, they will consume different forage types throughout the winter and spring. It is best to rotationally graze these perennial forages, thus allowing for new growth to occur.

Grazing CRP Land

This fall and winter, CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) lands are available for grazing due to the current drought situation. In order to graze these lands, the owner of the CRP ground and the potential leasee would need to submit an application to FSA (Farm Service Agency). This allows for management of CRP grounds, as well as provides more grazing options for producers.

Haying and Grazing Croplands

Alfalfa and grass hay are also an excellent source of feed, especially if winter grazing land is not available. Most commonly, this feed source is harvested and put into bales multiple times during the summer growing season. These hay bales are stored for use during the winter and spring months. Another option is to cut the hay and leave it in windrows for the cattle to graze. While these first two options are more labor intensive, cut hay provides cattle with one of the highest energy and protein levels. Another option is to allow alfalfa and grass fields to grow during the end of summer, rather than swathing and baling them. This forage can then be grazed during the winter months. Though protein values are lower for this option than for baling or leaving it in windrows, there are also fewer costs.

Supplements

In order for livestock to receive adequate amounts of nutrients, supplement mixtures are often required during the winter months. Corn and corn silage can be purchased to supplement cattle during the winter months. Corn is high in energy and has a highly digestible dry matter content compared to other feed sources. Though we do not have much corn grown in Juab County, grazing cattle on standing whole corn plants provides a high energy, low cost winter feed option. Cottonseed meal, soybean meal and canola meal are high protein sources that can be fed during the winter months. Salt is provided as a means of limiting supplement consumption and increasing water consumption.