

AGRI-FACTS

Practical Information for Alberta's Agriculture Industry

Revised August 2006

Agdex 420/54-1

Feed Waste Management

When feed costs rise, the issue of feed wastage becomes more important in cattle operations. There are two main areas of feed loss: the first is the physical loss of feed itself and the second is when feeding the wrong combination of feeds, a combination that does not meet the needs of the animal.

Here are some quick points to consider:

Reduce physical feed wastage

Storage losses

- Your goal for storage losses should be 5 per cent or less.
- Consider the long term value of hay sheds, tarps, feed storage inoculants, location of the stacks and flooring that the feed is on. The payback period for any storage technique depends on the nutrient and market value of the feed, the length of time the feed is to be stored and the amount of rotting that would occur from contact with rain or melting snow.
- Storage facilities can be a very effective risk-reducing tool. Purposely keep some feed over from year to year to reduce the risk of a feed shortage from a drought year.
- Storage facilities are also a cost-reducing tool. Purchase leftover feed in the spring because sellers will often sell at clearance prices to avoid having their leftover feed rot in the rain. By purchasing and storing the feed under cover, you can build next winter's feed inventories very economically.

Feeding losses

- Your feeding waste goal should be 5 per cent or less.
- Examine your current feeding equipment and consider changing it to reduce losses.

- Research has shown that feeding processed hay and long hay in the snow during the winter will result in 19 per cent and 12 per cent losses respectively. Using a feeder for processed hay will reduce those losses to about 5 per cent.
- Pencil out the value of using efficient feeders. Naturally, the feed savings need to be greater than the lifetime cost of the feeder, its maintenance costs and the additional inconveniences of feeding into a feeder. Feed savings are more significant during times of high feed cost versus times of low feed cost.

Match feed to livestock needs

These points can save costs to your operation at any time.

- Feed test any unusual feeds.
- Balance rations based on feed test values.
- Consult a professional nutritionist as needed.
- For beef cattle, use the computerized ration-balancing program called "Cowbytes."
- Monitor all classes of livestock weekly for changes in body condition.
- Allow for feed wastage when calculating portions.

Feed waste occurs two ways: through actual feed loss or by feeding the wrong combination

For more information, contact

Alberta Ag-Info Centre at 1-866-882-7677 or dial 310-FARM

For further reading

Check the website www.foragebeef.ca and look in the "feed wastage" folder.

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