



Making Best Use of the Hay Crop

Hay makes up a large part of the winter ration for most cowherds in Ontario. The quality and quantity of feed eaten by cows has an effect on:

- the condition of calves at birth,
- cows milking ability and
- potential for rebreeding.

Knowing the quality of your feed can help you make the best use of your hay crop to meet the varying nutritional needs of the herd.

Mature cows tend to eat about 2% of their body weight as dry matter. This is based on average quality hay at about 10% protein. Cows will eat less hay when it is lower quality and more when hay is higher quality. Poor quality hay takes longer to ferment in the rumen and cow feels full longer. It is the opposite for good quality with the process more rapid and animal feels hungry sooner. A cow's hay requirements including quality and quantity will vary depending on frame size, body condition, whether pregnant, nursing a calf etc. A 1400 pound cow will consume 35 to 40 lbs. of average quality hay per day including some waste.

Some Feeding Suggestions

Grouping beef cows in the fall based on age, body condition and nutritional need can make best use of available feed. This means cows in poorer condition or heifers still growing can receive higher quality hay or a grain supplement.

Farmers tell me dividing the cow herd isn't always practical. Another holding area is required. A second water source may be needed. These can be obstacles. Perhaps farmer can run their 2nd calf heifers together or older cows. If you can swing it here are some suggestions for groupings.

Three Group Strategy

The two-year old first calf heifers: These animals are still growing and pregnant with higher nutritional needs. They are too small to compete with larger, older, boss cows for supplement.

IAPO

First Nations Farm and Business Financing

The old cows (10 years and older) and the second calf heifers: This group usually needs better quality hay or some grain. Older cows are often down in condition, 2nd calf heifers are recovering from raising the first calf, carrying a second calf and need to rebreed. Other cows with less body condition could be included.

The rest of the herd: These animals are the core of the herd at their most productive age. This group is usually in the best body condition. Average quality hay should keep them on track.

Two Group Strategy

An alternative is going with 2 groups combining the first calf heifers with older cows and second calf heifers. The rest of the herd are still together.

Early cut first cut hay and second cut should go to the group with first calf heifers, older cows and second calf heifers. This group requires better quality hay and perhaps a supplement like grain.

For herds getting both 1st cut and second cut consider alternating bales. Put out 1st cut bales and when cleaned up by the following day or week depending on the feeding schedule put out second cut bales. Feeding good quality and lower quality bales together results in quick consumption of the good quality bales with more waste of the lower quality bales.

Salt and Mineral

It appears there is enough hay available for winter feeding in most areas of the province. With late harvesting due to wet conditions feed quality may be lacking. While supplementing may be a good option don't forget salt and mineral.

Salt and Mineral are important for:

- Calf development during pregnancy
- Strong calves at birth
- Timely cycling and rebreeding

Salt and mineral also are vital particularly when there is no supplementation. It is required for calf development during pregnancy, strong calves at birth and timely rebreeding. Blue salt and a 1:1 Ca: P mineral are suitable for average quality grass/legume mix hay. Feed salt and mineral in a loose form to encourage adequate consumption. Intake is limited when cows are forced to get their needs from a block.

IAPO

First Nations Farm and Business Financing