

Grant Dewell, DVM, Veterinary Diagnostic and Production Animal Medicine,  
Iowa State University

## Evaluate forages for winter feeding

**W**inter feeding the cow herd may be challenging for many cow-calf farmers again this year. Although many hay fields had abundant growth in the spring, rain prevented harvesting the hay at the ideal time resulting in some very mature and lower value hay stores.

Additionally, the wet weather was followed by high temperatures, and this resulted in a lot of ergot infestations in many areas. Some of the ergot bodies will have fallen off during harvesting, but grass that was heavily infested can still have enough ergot toxin left in the hay to cause problems if fed this winter. If you suspect that your hay may have some ergot issues, then it may be beneficial to have the ergovaline levels tested before feeding.

The lack of abundant good quality hay stores means that many cow-calf producers will be feeding low quality hay, corn stalks or some other type of forage this winter. Fortunately, cows can survive on low quality forage as long as they have access to supplemental nutrition. Some areas of concern are: protein, energy and vitamin and mineral content.

### Supplementing protein

Poor quality forage can be lacking in protein so a supplemental source such as alfalfa hay, corn co-products, soy bean meal or other sources should be available as needed to meet the cows' protein needs. Remember that as pregnant cows move to late gestation, they need at least two pounds of crude protein per day to meet their needs and the needs of the developing fetus.

### Weather impacts energy

Energy can also be an issue, especially when the cold weather sets in. For every degree that the effective temperature (tem-

perature and wind) is below 20°F, the cows' energy needs increase by 1%. Cow-calf farmers should be prepared to provide supplemental energy during times of prolonged cold stress to prevent the cow from depleting their body stores of energy.

Again, as cows move into late gestation it is beneficial for the cow to not be energy deficient to allow the calf to develop normally. The goal should be to keep cows at or above a body condition score of 5 throughout the winter.

### Mineral and vitamin issues

Low quality forages are also going to have mineral and vitamin issues. Make sure that your mineral supplement is meeting the mineral needs of the cow. If feeding corn co-products, the excessive sulfur may bind up some of the trace minerals and additional supplementation may be required.

Also, some cows won't consume adequate quantities of free choice mineral when consuming corn co-products so they may need to be mixed into the ration. Vitamin A and E supplementation should also be addressed.

Although cows can store some of these vitamins in their liver, they cannot store enough to get all the way through winter when consuming forage that has zero vitamin content.

Green alfalfa hay and grass hay has some vitamin content, but brown hay or corn stalks have limited vitamin availability. Many health issues of calves last spring were associated with low vitamin A and E levels at birth.

Feeding some non-traditional forages are not without risk. Although most of these forages have been utilized before, there can occasionally be problems. Sorghum or sudan-type hay can have toxic levels of prussic acid or nitrates. Be careful when introducing cattle to new supplies as levels can vary bale to bale.

Other forage such as radishes or turnips can also be grazed. Cattle should be slowly introduced to new fields and it is best to provide an additional source of forage (hay or corn stalks) to balance the intake.

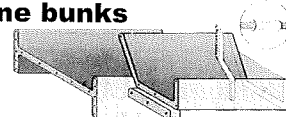
If you have questions about the body condition of your cattle or balancing a proper diet this winter, contact your Extension Beef Specialist or nutritionist. Your veterinarian can help you with any health issues this winter.

## Huber Slats

1497 - 170th St. • Wellman, IA 52356  
Bill Huber • Ph. 319-646-2907

### Fenceline bunks

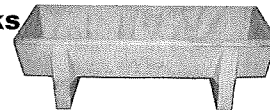
#### Key Benefits



- Acts as both a feeder & a fence for human protection
- Rounded interiors reduce feed waste
- Camphor edges reduce neck abrasions
- Bunks align to form any length
- Bunks are poured with 7,500 psi concrete
- Reinforced with solid rebar frame welded in place
- Optional concrete ends with drain holes available
- Features recessed post to prevent cattle from rubbing on post or cable
- Cable shim reduces wear & lengthens the life of cable
- Concrete step poured in the end of each bunk provides support for adjacent bunk
- Optional end steps are also available

### Yard bunks

#### Key Benefits



- Allows livestock to feed from both sides and ends.
- Rounded interiors reduce feed waste and prevent damage from freezing.
- Rounded camphor edges reduce neck abrasions.
- Solid concrete ends feature drain holes. Drain holes may be plugged for use as a waterer.
- Concrete footing poured on the end of each bunk keeps feed at the appropriate height.
- Bunks are poured with 7,500 psi concrete using 3/8-inch aggregate reinforced with solid 1/2" rebar on 6"x 6" wire mesh squares.