

Do I Have Enough Winter Feed?

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As a result of this summer's adverse weather, beef producers may again be faced with a shortage of winter feed similar to last winter. Now is the time to evaluate winter feed supplies vs. requirements and develop a plan of action. If the feed supply is inadequate then additional feed must be acquired, or cattle numbers reduced.

The number of days that feed is required must be determined. This will vary from around 90 to 150 days, depending on the climate in your area and the amount of stockpiled forage available. Stockpiled forage is an excellent way to reduce stored feed requirements.

A quick, easy way to estimate feed requirements is on the basis of animal units. This can be done based on a mature cow or a bull equal to one unit, yearling cattle equal to one-half unit and calves equal to one-fourth unit. Utilizing this method each animal unit will require approximately 25 pounds of hay or 50 pounds of corn silage, assuming average to good quality hay or silage.

For a herd of 35 cows, one bull, 8 replacement heifers and 16 yearling steers with a winter feeding period of 120 days, the following is an example calculation of stored feed requirements:

35 cows	x	1 animal unit	=	35 animal units
1 bull	x	1 animal unit	=	1 animal unit
8 replacement heifers	x	1/2 animal unit	=	4 animal units
16 yearling steers	x	1/2 animal unit	=	<u>8 animal units</u>
				48 animal units

The herd total is 48 animal units.

48 animal units	x	120 days	x	25 pounds of hay per day	=	144,000 pounds
			or			
48 animal units	x	120 days	x	50 pounds of silage per day	=	288,000 pounds

You also must have a good estimate of the quantity of feed available to determine if the animals' needs can be met. When estimating quantity of hay it is best to obtain the average weight of several bales and then multiply this times the number of bales.

Remember that large bales stored outside may sustain substantial losses during storage and feeding, which must be taken into consideration. To estimate the quantity of silage in a horizontal silo multiply the average width x the average height x the length to obtain the number of cubic feet. Remember to allow for any spoilage. The average weight of well packed silage is 40 pounds per cubic foot.

Remember that utilizing animal units to estimate feed requirements is just that, only a quick estimate. To be more accurate you need to consider exact nutritional requirements for the size of animal and stage of reproduction or growth desired. Also, feed supply can be more accurately estimated if you have a forage analysis to determine the exact nutrient content.