

Snow Affects Winter Grazing

Snow has covered a lot of winter pasture acres for quite a few days already this winter. How has it affected your winter grazing? It seems to me that it has been colder and snowier than usual, at least for this early in the season. If this is correct, it can affect the ability of your cattle to get the nutrition they need from grazing corn stalks or winter pasture.

When cattle graze, they often select plant parts like corn husks and grain or grass leaves that contain higher amounts of protein or energy than do the coarser stalks and stems. With all this snow, it can become difficult or impossible for them to make these selections. So your cattle eat what they can get to easily. The end result may be a diet that is less nutritious than usual. If this goes on for very long your cattle might lose weight and go out of condition.

So – what can you do about it? Obviously, you can't turn on a heater to melt the snow. Instead, you need to estimate how much different your animals' diets are from normal and provide supplements to replace those nutrients that are unavailable because of the snow.

This isn't difficult. Normally you probably supplement your cattle after they have grazed the best plant parts. All the snow does is force you to begin a little sooner or increase the amount they receive by a small amount.

Of course, I assume you normally supplement correctly. If your cows usually are a bit fat following winter, maybe they don't need the extra supplement. But if you usually end up with cows with just enough weight to be healthy, some extra might be needed this year.

That little extra might make all the difference this snowy winter.

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