

ON THE RANCH

The Importance of Updating & Maintaining a Marketing Plan

Every operation should develop and maintain a marketing plan. When developing a marketing plan, complexity and detail are less important than having something you are comfortable working with and adjusting.

To read the complete article click on the following link or contact your local Extension Office.

<http://newsroom.unl.edu/announce/beef/4731/27511>

90 Days before Calving Time to Sort off Your Thin Cows for Extra Feed

Now is the time to body condition score your spring-calving herd and sort off the thin cows so you can give them a little extra feed.

March calving cows have about 90 days left to put on body condition before calving. The last 90 days before calving is your last opportunity to cost effectively put condition back on thin cows.

Body condition at calving is an important factor affecting rebreeding performance of spring-calving cows. The longer you wait to put condition back on cows, the more difficult and expensive it becomes.

Cows calving in a body condition score of 5 or higher rebreed more quickly after calving than cows that are in a lower condition. Pregnancy rate increases as body condition at calving increase to a score of 5.

Not only do cows in a body condition score of 4 and thinner have reduced chances of rebreeding, but they also produce less colostrum and their calves have lower immunoglobulin levels. This means they may be less able to fight off disease. On top of that, calves from thin cows are less vigorous and slower to stand.

So, thin cows have a lessened chance of rebreeding and give birth to weaker calves. These are two good reasons to sort off thin cows and give them extra feed. Managing spring calving cows in two groups for the 90 days before calving allows you to better manage your feed resources. You can save feed by not overfeeding the cows that don't need it.



For more in-depth information, see the recently revised NebGuide Body Condition Scoring Beef Cows: A Tool for Managing the Nutrition Program for Beef Herds (<http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendIt/ec281.pdf>.) It describes the 1 to 9 of body condition scoring, complete with pictures and details for assigning scores.

Nebraska Extension also has Android (<http://go.unl.edu/bcsappandroid>) and Apple (<http://go.unl.edu/bcsappios>) versions of a smartphone app to help you learn to assign body condition scores.

Source: Jay Jenkins, Nebraska Extension Educator

How Much Can Selective Harvest Improve the Feed Value of Baled Corn Stover For Cattle?

The short answer is a lot! The valuable components of corn stover in terms of feed are the leaf and husk because they are the most digestible (have the most energy value to the animal) but they only comprise about 40% of the residue produced. UNL research has shown that the husk is 60% digestible, the leaf is 46% digestible and the cob and stalk are only 35% digestible. Thus a bale of corn stover with more leaf and husk and less stalk and cob would have greater energy content.

There are two harvesting technologies currently on the market that help a producer bale less stalk and make the bale be comprised of mainly leaf, husk, and cob. One of these is the Cornrower sold by New Holland. This attaches to a chopping corn head and catches the stover under the stalk rolls, chops it into small pieces, and placing it into a windrow.

Then after harvest the windrow can be baled (a double pass system). The number of rows of stalks that are chopped in with the leaf, husks, and cobs can be changed from 2 to 8 rows. Analysis of the digestibility of the bale produced with only two rows of stalks included was 66% compared to conventionally raked and baled stover that was 43% digestible.



The valuable components of corn stover in terms of feed are the leaf and husk. Photo courtesy of Mary Drewnoski.

There is also a baler sold by John Deere and Hillco Technologies that is hooked to the combine and collects the tailings straight out of the combine and bales it (single pass round baling system). This system resulted in bales that were 27% leaf, 17% husk, 42% cob and 14% upper stalk. In a feeding trial the stover baled with this system had 35% better energy value when fed to growing cattle than conventionally baled corn stover bales. Both of these selective harvest methods make the TDN value of the baled stover similar to good grass hay although protein is lower.

Another additional benefit is that the bales tend to be denser and thus reduce transportation costs per ton of DM. Furthermore, selective harvest would leave more residue on the field to feed the soil than traditional raking and baling. With current raking and baling methods 75 to 85% of the residue is removed.

Even if all of the leaf, husk, and cob produced were baled only around 50% of the residue would be removed. There are likely other ways that corn stover could be selectively harvested such as turning off the spreader on the combine and baling the windrow of tailings that result without raking.

When grazing corn fields cows already selectively harvest by consuming the grain first then the husks and leaves. It may be time we quit thinking about bales of corn stover as just “corn stalks” and start thinking about adding value to corn stover bales by selectively harvesting this feed resource.