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## Winter Feeding Tips

November is quickly slipping away with Thanksgiving meals and reflection just around the corner. The recent rains have been a welcomed change from the dry start to fall, but created muddy situations quickly. The weathermen today have made mention of the first snow flurries of the season, so winter cow feeding will be here sooner than many may want. Without stockpiled forages, crop residues, cover crops, etc... feeding of harvested forages is an inevitability for the cattle operation. Here are a few things to consider as we enter that season.

As the temperature drops outside, so could a cow's health. While cattle producers may not be able to eliminate all of the stress that winter places on their herds, research shows that there is a significant correlation between feed efficiency and feeding-site selection. The thermo neutral zone (TNZ) for healthy cattle is 32 to 77 degrees F. When the temperature outside falls below or rises above the animal's comfort zone, the body needs to produce more energy to keep the animal cool or warm.

When temperatures fall below the TNZ, cattle need to receive enough nutrition to help keep them healthy, meeting energy needs and in good condition. It is also important that feeding sites be placed in well-drained areas to reduce water, mud and manure buildup. A buildup of water could not only waste portions of hay bales, but could also decrease the nutritional value of the hay, creating a need for alternative nutrient sources to maintain herd health and performance. Excessive mud and manure around feeding sites also mean that cattle will have to exert more energy to reach feed.

Well-drained areas make the best feeding sites because mud accumulation is less likely to occur in these areas. An important consideration for producers is to make sure that waste runoff will have grass or other type of vegetation to filter through before reaching open surface water, such as ponds or streams. To prevent waste buildup, producers should rotate ring feeders before adding new bales of hay. One feeding site can feed approximately 15 to 20 head of cattle depending on the availability of other feed sources besides the hay.

An alternate to feeders is to roll hay out on the ground in a well-drained area. The key to this is approach is that hay needs to be unrolled in proportions that the herd can clean up in one day. Hay that lies on the ground for several days before cattle can clean it up will be wasted. An old adage for unrolling sites is "day one it's the dining room, day two the bedroom, day three the bathroom". Another option to consider is bale grazing, an article in itself for another day. Providing daily feed amounts, regardless of delivery methods, will most always provide the least amount of feed waste.

Winter storage areas for hay are also something that producers need to be thinking about. Rows should line up north to south, about two to three feet apart, so that sunlight will reach a greater surface area of the bales. This orientation will help evaporate moisture from the bales and the ground around them more quickly. Tightly wrapped hay bales will also absorb less moisture than loosely wrapped bales, ultimately ruining a smaller amount of hay. Storing on elevated, firm surfaces helps as well.