

Ration balancing reduces winter feed costs for cattle producers

The Situation

Northern Idaho Cattle producers typically have to feed their beef cows for five to six months during the winter feeding period. With high hay and supplement costs, and the lack of alternative cheaper feeds in the region, winter feed costs per cow are very high. Producers must carefully manage the winter feed ration to keep input costs low in order to be profitable.

Our Response

To address the problem with high winter feed costs, Jim Church, Extension Educator for the University of Idaho, Idaho County Extension System, initiated a program to help cattle producers analyze winter forages and develop least cost winter cow rations. To promote the effort, beef schools were held during the winter months of 2012 and 2013. The major topic covered at these schools was reducing winter feed costs using least cost rations.

Several issues of a monthly newsletter entitled, "Over the Wire, Beef Cattle E-Letter," was written that contained in-depth information on rations and balancing rations to reduce winter feed costs.

Producers also had the opportunity to have individual one-on-one consultation to have winter cow rations balanced.

Program Outcomes

The winter schools and newsletters were well received by producers. Several producers also took advantage of the consultations to develop winter rations. A rancher from Idaho County by the name of Gary Crea was very happy with the help he received in balancing a winter ration for his cows and was willing to share his success.



Analyzing forage quality and balancing winter rations for least cost, helps cattle producers reduce winter feed costs.

The winter cow ration that was developed for Mr. Crea, produced a savings of slightly over \$1 per head per day compared to the ration he was feeding. Mr. Crea stated that he saved \$140 per day in feed costs on his cowherd and used the ration for 100 days. The total savings in winter feed costs was \$14,000.

Mr. Crea also stated that at the end of the feeding period when the cows started to calve, they were in excellent body condition and the newborn calves were healthy.

Mr. Crea's ration was balanced using cheaper alternative feeds available in the area that reduced the total cost of the ration while meeting the nutrient requirement of the gestating cows.

The Crea Ranch success can be realized by other ranchers if ranch managers are willing to conduct forage quality tests, locate and price alternative feedstuffs and have their winter cow ration balanced.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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