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Management of Young Cows

The average cow herd in Ohio is just under 20 cows. With small herds, the management of different aged cows is possibly more of a challenge than for larger herds. This in part is because it may be hard to justify having multiple groups to feed each day when the numbers are small.

Older cows that are not as aggressive as they may have been a few years ago can be rooted out at feeding time. Even the old boss cow will eventually become one that is rooted out by middle age cows. The old cows are not the only ones, the younger cows are also likely to be less likely to get in there and fight for that last bite of feed. With that said which groups need the most nutrients in your herd? In most cases it would probably be the older cows and the 2 and 3 year olds.

With the weather we have experienced over the last month or two the hay pile sure seems to be shrinking quickly. Cows seem to stand and eat all day. As I have said in previous weeks, their energy needs are much greater when temperatures are where they have been recently here in Southern Ohio. When you consider nights like Super Bowl Sunday, the cattle were wet with the snow, plus the ground has thawed, so walking takes more energy and their wet hair provides less protection from the cold. **THEY NEED CALORIES!!!** This is a true statement for the entire herd and just a little supplemented, high energy feed will help. Last week in the first session of the Beef School we were told by OSU Extension Animal Nutrition Specialist, Francis Fluharty about some of the other advantages to supplementing energy. Francis discussed the gain in the animal's ability to digest hay better with the addition or supplementation of feeds like Soybean Hull Pellets and/or Corn Gluten Pellets.

While this is true for the entire herd, this is even more important for the old cows and the 2 and 3 year olds. A loss in body condition will not only add to the stress, but it could reduce the ability to breed back, not to mention the coming calf.

Consider this for the 2 and sometimes 3 year olds in the herd. They are the most difficult group to get re-bred in most cases. You have made a pretty good investment in keeping this animal as a replacement (or bought her to be a replacement) only to have her be open after the first calf. Her ability to stay in the herd and eventually do what you planned for her to do might depend on how she is managed. Even though it might take more effort and more time to do the daily feeding, giving this group a little extra care might be your best bet. Making sure these young cows get some extra feed will give them a better chance to perform. Just think, they are still growing, they may have had a calf nursing on them longer than you would have liked, and they are carrying another calf (we hope). The hope is that those young cows will calve again about 365 days after the one they have most recently had. For this to happen, she will need to cycle and rebreed about 80 to 90 days after calving, which is also about the same time that she will reach her peak for milk production. That is quite a bit to put on a young cow that is getting rooted away from any extra feed or maybe even the hay ring until the some of the others have eaten.

If space is limited, putting the older cows and young cows in a group together, away from the rest of the herd, would be better than leaving them all in one big group. The drawback to this is the cost of feed. If they are all left in one big group, chances are you are wasting feed dollars. You are probably over feeding some cows and under feeding others. Those healthy, middle aged cows probably need less attention and feed when comparing them to the young and old. Of course this does depend somewhat on the quality of your hay. Testing your forages is still a good investment.

Dates to Remember

- Feb. 18 & March 11 OSU Beef School sessions 2 and 3, both starting at 7 pm. The Beef School will be held at the Frisch's in West Union. Class is also offered in Piketon and the Fayette Co. Extension office in Washington Court House. Session details in Jan. 6 newspaper article and on the OSU Extension County webpage. (name of the county).osu.edu
- Feb. 10 Pesticide Testing opportunity for anyone wanting a Private or Commercial Applicator license for Ohio. Testing requires pre-registration with the Ohio Department of Agriculture. This can be done online at <http://pested.osu.edu> or call toll free at 800-282-1955. Other test dates include March 10, April 14 and May 12 at this time. Others may be scheduled if needed.
- March 7&8 Fifth Annual Small Farm Conference at Wilmington College. Registration information will be available soon.
- March 11 Farm and Family Night at Maysville Community and Technical College starting at 5:00 p.m. Tickets are needed, but they are FREE. Tickets can be picked up at the Adams, Brown, Clermont or Highland Co. Extension offices. There will be a large selection of classes to choose from that evening, plus a light meal and the trade show. A flyer with details will be available with the tickets.

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