

Fowler Seed Marketing

Serving your Seed & Soil Fertility Needs Since 1995

Forages for the Beef

Cow-Calf Herd



Most beef cow herds in Ohio and surrounding states either calve in the spring (March through May) or the fall (September through November). With minor differences, cows in both produce one calf worth about \$500 at weaning; therefore, feed cost per cow needs to be around \$1 per day on average.

Since hay equipment is 3 to 5 times the cost of fence resulting in mechanically harvested forage being about



twice the cost per ton of animal harvested feed, it is generally most-profitable to graze as much as possible.

Nutritional requirements of mature beef cattle are significantly less than growing stock. However, those requirements change as the cow progresses through the following stages: early lactation, late lactation/early gestation, mid-gestation, and late gestation.

To meet her nutritional needs while minimizing cost, it is imperative to understand how to grow and allocate appropriate quality forages to the cow herd. The time of year that a cow is passing through a given stage obviously depends on when the herd calves, but similar forages managed and allocated a little differently can work for both types of herd.

During January through March, spring calving cows are in late gestation (increasing requirements) while fall calving cows are in late lactation / early gestation (decreasing requirements). In both cases, any residual stock-piled pasture, fall planted small grain forage, crop residue or brassica can be utilized as soil conditions allow.

Colder temperature increase energy requirements. With spring calving cows, feed quality and body condition should

be monitored with any deficiencies being made up with store forages. In many cases during this window, stored feed will be used to sustain the cow herd.

Fair to moderate quality hay, BMR sorghum silage (**FSM Brand Silo Candy BMR**) or balage (**FSM Brand Cow Candy II BMR**) and corn silage (Masters Choice) generally provide adequate protein and energy. The main difference between a spring and fall calving herd is the trend in requirements; low to moderate and moderate to low respectively.

The term 'spring flush' is often used to refer to cool season pasture growth from April into June. This proliferation of grass fits perfectly with the needs of a spring calving herd, if properly managed.

We recommend applying the early spring foliar portion of our **FSM Bio-Enhanced Pasture Fertility Program** to address several potential issues:

- **Magnesium deficiency (grass tetany) and Low energy (washy) forage**
- **Trace mineral deficiencies. Trace minerals such as zinc (which helps with Phosphorous uptake and the animal immune system)**
- **Cool soil temperatures restrict the availability of Magnesium and Phosphorous**
- **Excessive moisture and nitrogen alone can create forage volume without substance**
- **Forage with inadequate absorption levels of:**
 - **Manganese...** important in reproductive hormone cycles
 - **Copper...** impacts calf health and growth rate

In operations with insufficient pasture acres, fall-planted triticale (**Trical Brand Flex 719**), rye (**Aroostook**), spring-planted forage oats (**FSM Brand Banquet forage oats**-fall calving) or forage oat-pea mixtures (**FSM Brand OPTimum II** forage blend-spring calving) can be utilized to minimize the acres needed to carry the cow herd.

Weaned fall calves should be given the best spring grass with the fall calving cows cleaning up soiled or more

Forages for the Beef Cow-Calf Herd

mature pasture. Stored forage should only be used during this window when it's too wet or grazed forage is unavailable. Fresh spring cows need moderate quality hay or haylage. Fall cows can utilize low quality hay during this window.

Grazers refer to the 'summer slump' when the combined effect of grasses restarting the growth cycle, an increase in hot, dry weather and perhaps some management errors result in pasture shortages. This is the window when animal-friendly endophyte enhanced, soft-leafed tall fescue (**BarOptima + E34**) shines because the endophyte increases the heat and drought tolerance of the plant resulting in sustained production.

Well-fed pastures such as those receiving the late spring application of our **FSM Bio-Enhanced Pasture Fertility Program** tend to remain green and ready to translate rainfall into growth. Various other products can be planted for grazing during this window.

Perennial warm season grasses (switchgrass, indiangrass, eastern gamagrass), warm season annuals (**Cow Candy II BMR** sorghum-sudan or **Dessie's** teff), Italian ryegrass (**Green Spirit** or **FSM Brand Green Gold**) for cows in late gestation, forage rape (**T-Raptor**) which is usually planted with BMR sorghum-sudan or even red clover (**FSM Brand Wildcat**) established in a small grain stubble.



Stored feed of appropriate quality should only be used if conditions are too wet or pastures are too short for grazing or to slow-down and stretch high-protein pasture. The fall calving cows need an increasing plan of nutrition as they move toward calving. Cows that calved in spring have decreasing needs as their calves approach weaning.

The last quarter of the year is perhaps the most challenging for herd managers because the weather can be

extremely variable and because the primary focus of many farmers is grain harvest, especially for those who are also calving during this window.

Grazing options can range from stock-piled cool-season pasture and unharvested hay, early in the window, to annual forages, planted in late summer or early fall, and crop residues later.

Combinations of triticale (**Trical Brand Flex 719**), forage oats (**FSM Brand Banquet**) and turnips (**Barkant**) seeded in August or September are usually ready for use in November and December.

Corn stalks can be utilized best by spring calving cows with lower requirements unless interseeded with Italian



ryegrass or any of the above suggested combinations to make the forage suitable for early lactation cows.

Cows with young calves and those soon to calve require stored feed with moderate energy and protein levels to support lactation when appropriate grazing is not available or soil conditions are too wet.

Corn silage (**Masters Choice**), BMR sorghum silage (**FSM Brand Silo Candy BMR**), BMR sorghum balage (**FSM Brand Cow Candy II BMR**), and oat-pea balage (**FSM Brand OPTimum II**) are all energy dense products that can support cow performance when stored feed is necessary.

Whether a herd manager has a fall or spring calving herd, the challenge is to meet their nutritional requirements while keeping feed expense in-line, typically by maximizing grazing days, and while being prepared to feed appropriate quality stored feed when necessary.

To learn more about to applying these principles on your farm, visit your local FSM dealer or call Kevin Fowler at 888.249.SEED

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