

July 4, 2012

In response to your questions . . .

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Based on the calls and e-mails we've received over the past week or so, it appears most cattlemen have similar concerns . . . what are my feed alternatives? While most pastures remain essentially dormant and non-vegetative despite the green-up from recent storms which traveled across Ohio, corn is silking in many parts of the state despite being only 5 feet tall.

If nothing else, the forage deficit has challenged the thought processes and caused many of us to consider non-traditional management practices. It's also created lots of questions. Below you will find responses to some of the most asked questions that to this point we simply haven't got around to printing in this publication.

Q: For a couple of weeks we've been feeding our cow herd 12 lbs. shelled corn, 2 lbs. of supplement, and 3 to 4 lbs. of hay, but the cows seem extremely hungry. So we have increased the amount of hay to 8 to 10 lbs. and have increased the corn to approximately 16 lbs., and they still seem hungry.

A: It's not uncommon for the cows to think they are hungry simply because their stomachs are not full. Nutritionally they are likely getting what they need (depending on their stage of gestation/lactation). It's much like you or I if we went from a high bulk diet and switched to a very nutrient dense diet . . . we'd be eating less volume, and constantly think we were hungry, thus crabbing and complaining until Mom was ready to throw us out of the house. After a while our stomachs accept the fact we should be eating less volume, and we forget that we thought we were hungry, and then get on with life.

Two weeks is not enough time to tell "visually" if the cow's nutrition needs are appropriately being met. As soon as you wean the calves and the cows quit lactating, the nutrient needs of your cows will be reduced even further.

If you believe they need a little more nutrition, increase the corn, but not the hay. More than 3 or 4 pounds of hay per day will reduce the feed efficiency of the corn.

This link to the OSU Beef Team "Library" will take you to more detail on both using a high corn diet for cows and a weaning feed protocol. <http://beef.osu.edu/library/feedrout.html>

Q: Can I still plant Teff?

A: Yes, but it's quickly getting late in the summer to really gain the benefit from Teff. And, while Teff grass does excel in the heat of summer, it does also require moisture to germinate. With evenings to be getting cooler and the days shorter within the next month, oats planted the first of August may result in more total pounds of feed, at less cost.

Q: Is there any way we can cut corn and bale it to wrap for silage? We would like to cut with disc bind, round bale and wrap it.

A: Yes, it can probably be done just as you describe. I have concerns though about the ability to get it baled without significant field losses, the ability to pack it tightly enough in the bale that it ferments correctly, and the cost of wrapping bales.

Consider employing a custom harvester to chop and ensile drought damaged corn into silage bags. The savings in quality losses alone may cover the cost of this custom operation. It will also result in less field losses, nearly perfect fermentation, and a processed feed that is very easily fed in bunks year around if need be. The limitation is that bales can be fed one at a time, but once a bag of corn silage is open, it's difficult to seal it back up if you don't choose to feed the entire bag until it's gone.

Q: Since oats are a "spring" crop, will they tolerate the heat when planted in mid summer?

A: Past experience tells us that oats tolerate the day time heat pretty well . . . especially if the evenings cool off. This is likely the reason we've had best results in the past when oats weren't planted until late July, or early August. If you recall, the summer of 2007 was a hot and relatively dry one. While we still believe oats are best when planted near August 1, this link is a chronology of photos and data of what happened when they were planted July 7, 2007. Note that the July heat is likely what caused the oats you will see to make heads:

<http://beef.osu.edu/Oats07/Oats07.html>

For more on this year's forage quality, yield and management, [listen to this 4 minute interview with Dave Russell on Brownfield Ag News](#) (in mp3 format).