



Creep feeding calves



by Murray Feist
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While creep feeding calves on pasture is an added expense, it may be necessary this grazing season. Low spring moisture and cooler temperatures may have compromised pasture quality and quantity, delaying the growth of spring pasture grasses.

For lactating cows that have high feed and energy demands, which may not be met by pasture forages alone, creep feeding the calf can help alleviate some of the grazing pressure from the cow. A good rule to follow is for every pound of creep fed to a calf, one-half to one pound of forage is saved from grazing by the cow.



Creep feeding calves is an effective management tool

The most important function of creep feed is to provide energy and protein to the calf. Most creeps are made of purchased commercial supplements or local on-farm grains. The creep should contain 13 to 16 per cent protein to be effective on low quality/quantity pastures. Common cereal grains such as oats and barley can be blended with canola meal, soybean meal or distiller grains to provide adequate protein and energy. Calves destined as breeding herd replacements should be fed a creep containing a minimum of 50 per cent oats (or screening pellet equivalent) to prevent over-conditioned calves. Whole oats are a common ingredient that can be used effectively as a creep. Peas and lentils can be economical to feed at levels of up to 67 per cent of the creep mix. Wheat and barley should be managed to prevent over consumption and grain overload.

Creep feed can be started two months after calving. This coincides with the peak milk production from the cow. After two months post-calving, milk production will begin to gradually decline while the nutrient and feed intake demanded by the calf is increasing.

Creep feeding calves is an effective management tool to reduce stress on cows and heifers when pasture quality and quantity is low and nutritional requirements are high. In periods of drought, creep feeding can stretch pasture forage supplies and reduce stress on pastures.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Call the Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377; or
- Visit the Saskatchewan Agriculture website at www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca and click on Production | Livestock | Feeds/Nutrition | Creep Feeding.

DETERMINING A PRICE FOR YOUR HAY



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Several things need to be considered when determining a value for hay. These include the quality of the feed, the cost of cutting and baling and current market conditions.

The type of forage, as well as the harvest stage, will be important in determining price. The nutritional value and palatability will vary depending on the type of grass or legume. The quality will be lower if the hay was cut late and is already quite mature.

The second consideration is the cost of cutting and baling the forage. Each operation will have its own costs. Calculate your cost of production using your own numbers. Additionally, calculate the cost of growing the forage and the cost to cut and bale it. Every operation will have different costs depending on yield and inputs.

Calculating the cost of cutting and baling forages is especially important to know. This information can be used to help calculate standing hay prices, and should be taken into consideration in the selling price of baled hay. Assuming a one tonne yield, 120 HP tractor, 14 foot haybine and 5 foot by 6 foot bales, you could have a cost of \$35-38 per tonne to cut and bale. You can use the 2008-09 Farm Machinery Custom and Rental Rate Guide to estimate costs. The guide is available on Saskatchewan Agriculture's website at

www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca.

Click on Management | Financial Planning | Farm Machinery Custom and Rental Rate Guide.

Thirdly, current market conditions need to be factored into the price. It is important to have a feel for what markets are doing in your area. Local supply and demand is a major factor affecting hay prices. Therefore, base your price on local market conditions. Additionally, transportation costs become significant with distance.



Regardless of the markets, it's important to know what you are selling and what it costs to produce that product. Both quality and cost of production need to be identified to ensure all costs are covered and a fair price is set.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Contact the Agriculture Knowledge Centre 1-866-457-2377.

