

Beef Cattle Management Considerations for December

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Cow Herd Management - If not already done, take inventory of and test harvested forages for the following: moisture/dry matter, crude protein, energy (NEm, NEg, and/or TDN), fiber components (ADF and NDF), macro-minerals (calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium and salt), nitrates and/or prussic acid, when appropriate starch for silage crops. Calculate forage needs based on herd inventory, cattle weight, and days, and develop a plan to ensure that adequate harvested forage is available if grazing is limited. (<https://www.agmanager.info/hay-inventory-calculator>.) Body condition score cows to develop informed supplementation strategies (both spring and fall-calving herds.) Targeted BCS at calving: 5 for mature cows, 6 for young females (2, 3, & 4 year olds) Record scores with the BCS Record Book from K-State Research and Extension. (<https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/Item.aspx?catId=562&pubId=19320>) Consider utilizing crop residues for late-fall and winter grazing needs. Assess down grain in the field and be aware of nitrates and prussic acid (around the time of frost for sorghums.) For spring-calving cow herds: schedule pregnancy checking if not already done. How were pregnancy rates relative to last year? Do we need to re-think the fall/winter nutrition program? For fall-calving cow herds: plan to adjust your nutrition program to match needs of lactating cows. Use the estrus synchronization planner (<https://www.iowabeefcenter.org/estrussynch.html>) to help plan synchronization protocols. Review your marketing strategy for cull cows. Cows with a BCS greater than 6.0 will likely sell well with current market prices. Look for opportunities to increase value by adding weight prior to market. Ensure bulls undergo breeding soundness exams prior to fall/winter service. Manage young and mature bulls during the offseason to ensure bulls are BCS greater than 5.0 prior to the next season of use.

Calf Management - If not already done, arrange to wean spring-born calves. Finalize plans to either market calves or retain and add weight post-weaning. If marketing calves, communicate your strategy to prospective buyers in advance. If not already done, schedule your breeding protocols for fall replacement heifers in advance of the breeding season. If synchronizing with MGA, make sure intake is consistent at 0.5 mg of melengestrol acetate per head per day for 14 days, and remove for 19 days prior to administering prostaglandin. If retaining calves post-weaning: review your nutrition plan. Ensure you have sufficient forages available to match cow herd needs. Closely observe feed and water intake the first few weeks. Make sure all cattle have sufficient access to feed and water. Review/update your health protocols as needed for either weaned or newborn calves. Either consider supplementing fall-calving pairs or creep feeding fall-born calves to maintain calf performance on low-quality winter forages. For replacement heifers, manage your program to properly develop them prior to your given breeding time.

Pasture Management - Make plans for controlling invasive species for the next growing season. Winterize water sources if applicable. Work on fencing/facility projects as time/weather allows.

General Management - Develop and/or review your risk management plans for the coming year. Evaluate your short and long-term herd inventory goals with current conditions. Update lease arrangements as necessary. Consider opportunities to lock prices in, if possible, for co-products and commodity feeds. Understand what nutrients you are targeting to purchase and price feeds on a cost per unit of nutrient basis.

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For more information, please contact the local K-State Research and Extension Office.

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