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Mark Keaton's Extension News: Winter management checklist for cattlemen

January and February represent two of the tougher months for the cattleman and the cow herd. During these months, we can experience the coldest weather of the year. Snow, ice or extremely wet weather can also be added to the list. The cow-calf operator with a fall-calving herd has young calves on the ground, and spring-calving operations will be starting to calve soon. The following list of management practices should be in place.

- The herd should be divided into groups according to nutrient requirements. The most common groups are: dry cows, nursing cows, replacement heifers and first-calf heifers. These groups should be in separate pastures and fed according to their needs. Feeding the whole group at the same level will result in some being overfed and others being underfed. The end result of feeding the herd together and at the same level will be a decrease in reproduction performance.
- The feeding program should be built around forage analyses on the stored forages being fed. Of all the feeds used in cattle operations, forages are the most variable in feeding values. With forage tests, producers then can supplement forage with the correct mix of grain and protein meal to meet nutrient needs of the animals being fed. Hay samples can be submitted to University of Arkansas for a chemical analysis and feeding recommendations by Baxter County Extension office. A lab fee of \$18 will cover moisture, crude protein, crude fiber and TDN calculation for each sample submitted.
- Heifers, weanling or yearling replacements and first-calf heifers should get extra care at all times. They require extra care to achieve the proper amount of growth prior to breeding and after breeding. They also need extra care with their first calf. The first-calf heifer still is growing in addition to nursing and raising her calf. Neglecting heifers through the winter or other periods of time usually will result in slower growth, loss of body condition and failure to breed or rebreed. This then will result in a lower percent calf crop weaned for the herd.
- Cows due to calve soon should be in good body condition. If cows are thin, increase feed to get some condition on them by calving. This will help them rebreed. A thin cow at calving will not be able to gain body condition because she is nursing a calf.
- Have bulls checked for breeding soundness. This can be done by local veterinarians.

For information on beef cattle production, call University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service at 425-2335.

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