FOOTHILLS FORAGE AND GRAZING ASSOCIATION
Innovation, education and regenerative agriculture

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GRASSROOTS NEWS & VIEWS
September 2023

Director's Note — Wolter Van der Kamp

Howdy folks,

The mornings are getting cooler, and the first leaves have already turned, or fallen off the trees. A little early maybe, but both sure signs that summer is coming to an end. Personally, I welcome having to put a sweater back on in the morning, but summer always seems to fly by so fast. Here's a quick peek back at our summer here at the Bar AD, west of Longview.

During the winter I had applied for funding through the Resilient Agricultural Land Program (RALP) to upgrade and expand my rotational grazing setup. This seemed to come just at the right time.

It took a lot of my extra time during the early months of summer, but having all those extra pastures sure allowed us to be more adaptive in our grazing this year.

Little precipitation in May left us with creeks that did not run very well or for very long, requiring us to haul water in order to utilize a lot of these pastures.

June seemed a little more promising, although it mostly seemed like too little, too late. Despite that, with the help of an intern, we were able to cover all the work required, and leave our pastures in reasonable shape, till the cows headed for forestry.

After a quick family weekend away, and with the cows now in forestry, July let us focus on getting the bulls ready to go out and heifers ready to AI.

July also brought us the Stockmanship School and Challenge. This was a great event, showcasing the importance of good handling. In utilizing the techniques taught at this school, we should be able to better work and handle our cattle in a low stress way, leaving more pounds on your animals.

When August brought the heat, we were lucky enough to spend some good days at the river and the lake with family and friends, and recuperate both body and mind.

As we roll into September, the excitement of weaning is just around the corner. Finally getting rewarded for all our hard work. And with the current markets, it seems we will be rewarded well. If you missed the Stockmanship School, FFGA has a Cattle Handling Workshop on September 14, which will be well worth checking out in preparation of gathering, weaning and handling all our critters this fall.

With fall and winter approaching, the time to start planning and learning for next year is also here. For me, I got fortunate enough to get into the Ranching for Profit School that FFGA is hosting this fall and look forward to seeing some of you there. If you did not get in, make sure to follow FFGA, as we will do our best to provide you with many other opportunities to learn and connect.

I wish everyone the best in their gather and harvest this fall!

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IN THIS ISSUE

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On the Cover: Managed Grazing Strategies on Gem Native Community Pasture. Photo: FFGA

Thank you for your support!

Several options for winter grazing


Photo: FFGA

Winter grazing can work because it addresses one of the largest costs in maintaining a cow herd — yardage. For a simple definition, yardage is everything that is not feed. It includes tractors, fuel, depreciation on equipment, yard lights, fences, corrals and labour among other things.

Some work in 2017 was done in both Alberta and Saskatchewan had shown that the average wintering cost for a cow was over $2 per day and some operations are over $3. For a 200-day winter, that is $400 and $600 respectively, just to feed one cow.

Put another way, yardage is the investment in fine china, silverware and waiter service when paper plates will do. I am of the firm opinion that yardage kills cow-calf outfits and most of us are better off to invest limited funds in nutrition rather than delivery strategies.

In the first article (Grainews, Jan. 2017) we talked a bit about some of the technical aspects of winter grazing. There are a lot of ways to winter graze so I thought it might be worthwhile touching on some of the options along with some of the pros and cons of each. We have tried a lot of things at home and although we continue to experiment, we have evolved a suite of techniques that we use in combination most winters.

Stockpiled forages

Stockpiling means allowing grass to grow and then grazing it through the snow.

Pros — very low cost, limited labour (may not require cross fencing).

Cons — have to be very cautious about monitoring cows (not a high-energy diet), access can be difficult with deep or packed snow conditions, requires grazing management.

Swath grazing

This is one of the most common ways to start into winter grazing, and it is a great tool. Swath grazing basically means growing an annual grain crop, swathing it in roughly the mid-dough stage and then grazing the cows on the swaths. There have been some tremendous breakthroughs in swath grazing including recent work on triticale. We use a multi-species swath grazing mix that includes a very heavy seeding rate and usually consists of barley, oats, a legume (alfalfa/hairy vetch) and a winter cereal of either rye or triticale.

Pros — relatively low cost for seed and field operations; seeding period can be relatively late.

Cons — may be difficult to access swaths with deep, windswept packed snow. Wet falls can result in losses due to mould. May miss some spring moisture with late seeding. Need to limit access to ensure cattle don't eat all the heads and run into an energy deficit. May be low in protein. May be some risk of nitrates with early fall frosts.

Rake bunching

Rake bunching is sort of one step past stockpiled forage or swath grazing. In our situation, we use an old dump rake to pull swaths into piles to improve access through deep snow. This has been one of the lowest-cost ways we have found to winter cattle.

Pros — improves access to feed; feed quality is high.

Cons — one additional field operation; may need to cross fence to control access.

Corn grazing

Grazing standing corn has become very common in my neighbourhood and is one of the tools we use in winter grazing.

Pros — High-yield, high-energy crop. No field operations after spraying. Easily accessed through snow. Can provide wind shelter. Can provide a disease break in rotation.

Cons — Expensive to grow, somewhat risky (long growing season). Requires attention to detail and agronomics. Must be cross fenced

Bale grazing

Bale grazing has become a staple of our winter feeding program in Vermillion. In fact we even use bale grazing on our backgrounders and weaned calves. Basically with bale grazing, the bales are set out in the field ahead of time and are rationed out with electric fencing. In fact on land that we own or rent, we very seldom haul bales, and prefer to fence around them during the winter. Some producers I have met even bale graze with net wrap and leave the wrap on, picking it up in the spring.

Pros — Import and distribution of nutrients and organic matter on bale-grazing site. Easy access in deep snow. Control over ration quality. Reduced spoilage vs. swath grazing

Cons — Twine removal. More expensive than swath grazing.

Chaff/straw bunches

Chaff bunching can be done a variety of different ways, however two pretty common ones are to use a buncher at the back of the combine to create straw/chaff piles in the field or to use a chaff wagon to collect and dump chaff in the field after the combine. These can be a good source of feed. We do not have a lot of personal experience with this, since we are strictly cattle and have not found a grain farmer to participate in a project yet, but learned in visiting with several producers who use this as a feed source there is a lot to be gained.

Pros — Utilizes a byproduct of grain farming. Low cost. Relatively easy access through snow (pile-size dependent). Clean up weed seeds and cycle nutrients in a cropping system.

Con — May not be a complete ration, particularly for protein.

Silage pile grazing

We have not engaged in silaging on our operation as I could never figure out an economical way to feed it back out (that yardage problem again), however it is a high-quality feed that stores well. This summer I met a couple of producers that are silaging and creating piles in the field and then are using electric fence to control access to the pile and grazing it on the spot. I have added these on my "to be toured" list.

Pros — High-quality feed that stores well, saves trucking to pit and feeding from pit to field

Cons — Cost of silage operation. Needs to be supplemented. There might be freezing or pit-face issues (under carving).

Cons can be overcome

These are just a few of the winter grazing options that are being used out there and just a sampling of some of the pros and cons of each. Again, like most things, cons can be managed into pros or at least minimized into smaller issues.

Author: Sean McGrath (2017)

Original Article: https://www.grainews.ca/livestock/several-options-for-winter-grazing/

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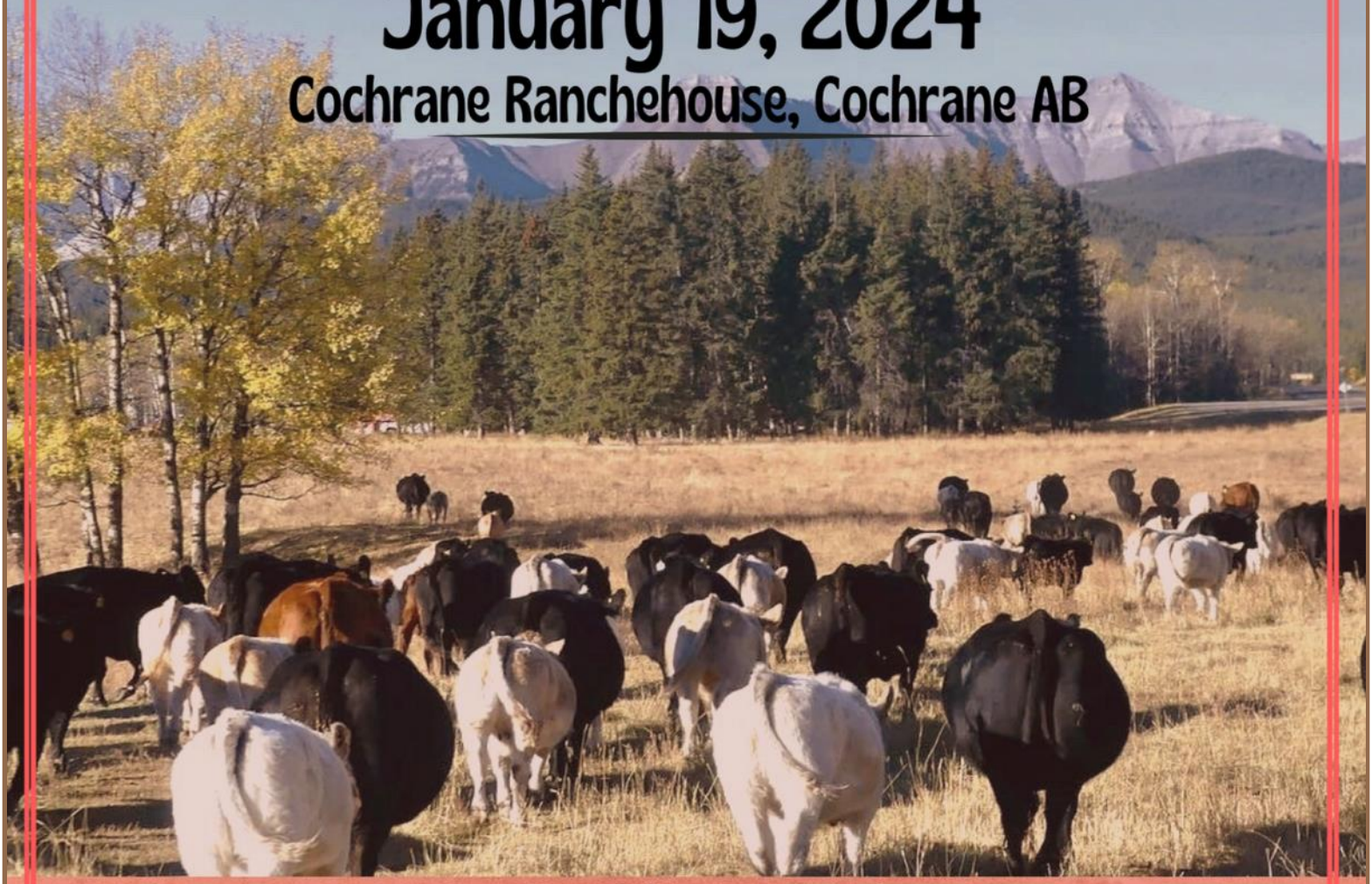

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Early weaning an option during drought


Photo: FFGA

Early weaning can be a viable option when pasture and feed supplies are low due to drought, academics and specialists say.

Dr. Bart Lardner and Dr. Greg Penner, both with the University of Saskatchewan, say early weaning can reduce cows' nutrient requirements. If calves can transition through weaning with little stress and effect on appetite, cows and calves can both benefit in a year when feed sources are limited.

"(Calves) must be fed quite differently than cows. Milk is very energy-dense and we need to provide something with similar nutrient levels," says Penner.

Choice of feed will depend on age of the calves at weaning. Early weaning is a broad term and could mean 45 days or 120 days old, and there's a big difference in what those calves need.

"The feeding and management of the younger ones is more challenging, making sure they are eating enough of a very high-quality calf starter. There are some risks associated with younger calves, like coccidiosis or digestive upsets," Penner says.

Dwayne Summach, a livestock and feed specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture, says early weaning for most people means about four to five months of age, since three-month-old calves need more care than most beef producers want to provide.

"We could wean calves at 20 days of age, but it's more practical to wean a four-month-old calf. Even at that age, calves will be small, but they've been with mom long enough to have a good start," says Summach.

By that age calves have been eating grass, the rumen is developing and they have adequate rumen microbes to digest forage.

"They still need concentrated, high-quality palatable feed if they no longer have milk. The feed must be higher quality than most people realize," he says.

"Concentrates

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must be palatable, and if we can avoid lots of starch, we avoid some of the common digestive upsets. This is where dried distillers grains are ideal because calves like it. Corn distillers grain is very palatable and sweet tasting," says Summach.

He advises getting calves used to eating the feed before weaning because they may be reluctant to try foods they've never eaten before.

"One drawback to distillers grain is that it may be too high in protein. It needs to be a balanced diet. We usually want a concentrated feed supplement that's about 16 to 18 percent protein and nutrient dense.

"If we're starting with 200-pound calves on May 15 or June 1 and want them to be 650 lb. by late October, they must gain more than two lb. per day. They need high quality feed, usually some combination of proteins and grain, and often talking about creep feeders and free-choice access. We need to include some fibre, so a creep feed often includes some alfalfa pellets, beet pulp pellets or some other non-starch carbohydrates."

Weaned calves put directly on pasture may just coast along and not gain. They need feed suited for growth and performance.

"We need to feed them better, which means buying more supplement (and) more cash cost," Summach acknowledged. "It should, however, result in improvement in overall profitability because calves are more efficient converters of concentrates when they are young. Their feed-to-gain ratio is usually better, the younger they are."

Alexis DeCorby, a livestock and feed specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture, says when forage availability is poor, early weaning can take pressure off cows so they regain weight before winter.

"A fatter cow is easier to feed through winter than a thin cow that needs to put weight back on. If cows come off pasture in poor condition and we must supplement them right away with grain, we lose the opportunity to utilize poor-quality feeds when their nutritional requirements are low," she says.

"There are benefits of really early weaning. If a cow is no longer lactating, there is better chance for her to rebreed and have a calf next year. If we wean early, however, we must make sure those babies are used to eating something first.

"Sometimes when weaning early you might catch a good market ahead of the fall glut. Other times it may be better to background those calves longer. It depends on your operation and the markets. If you can hold them and grow them, you have more control on when you sell them, and wait for the price to get better."

If the calf weighs 300 to 400 lb., what is the target for weight at sale time?

"What is your expected average daily gain?" asks Lardner. "Is it 1.5 to two lb. per day? Expected feed intake for those calves would be nine to 11 lb. per day. They need some forage, with enough energy and protein in the diet.

"We've looked at all kinds of different fibre sources for cows, and options might include salvage crops. But with calves you must make sure they can handle the feed and keep gaining and growing. Basically, you are just backgrounding them early."

Lardner advises producers to figure out how much daily gain is needed for calves to reach the desired target.

"Have an objective, and make sure you have a market. You might have an arrangement with a local feed yard or someone who is finishing calves, or sell through an auction market," says Lardner.

If the calves are already weaned and backgrounded, they are more saleable.

Due to drought, many forages don't have optimum vitamin or mineral levels so supplements may be needed for rebreeding success and for calves that perform well.

"The open rate will probably be higher this year if we don't consider weaning early or supplementation. Consult with your vet if you plan on early weaning. Your vet may recommend a different vaccination program for those young calves, to help with some of these issues," says DeCorby.

Author: Heather Smith Thomas
Original Article: https://www.producer.com/livestock/early-weaning-an-option-during-drought/

Supplementing Cattle on Drought-affected Pastures and Ranges


Photo: FFGA

Cattle producers generally have two main options for meeting the nutrient requirements of cattle on drought affected pastures and ranges. The first is to provide supplemental feed to ensure the cow herd has adequate energy, protein, vitamins, and minerals. The second is to reduce the nutrient requirements of the cow to a point where they can be met with available forage.

Producers may consider renting additional pastures or moving cattle to areas where pastures are in better condition as an alternative to supplementation. In addition, producers may consider selling all or a portion of the herd to reduce stocking rates sufficiently for pasture conditions. Cow-calf/yearling producers may consider removing yearlings from drought affected pastures and placing them directly in the feedyard to reduce stock numbers.

Available crop residues such as small grain straw, corn stover, and other byproducts of crop production represent important methods of stretching tight feed supplies during drought conditions. See related information here: Ammoniation of Low Quality Roughages.

Drought-affected pastures and native range generally do not produce adequate forage to maintain "normal" stocking rates, so producers intending to remain fully stocked must provide supplemental energy to meet the needs of the cow herd. Pastures and native range that are dormant due to drought conditions may be low in vitamin A, phosphorus, and protein. Meeting the need for these nutrients is important if cow herd productivity is to be maintained.

Reductions in stocking rate will benefit range plants by reducing stress and will also provide more forage for the remaining cattle. When stocking rates are reduced in accordance with production, only small effects on weaning weight may be noted. If stocking rates are not reduced, supplemental feeding is necessary to maintain herd productivity and alleviate grazing pressure.

Providing Supplemental Feeds During a Drought

Minerals.

Provide the same salt and mineral mixture during drought as you would during normal conditions. However, during drought phosphorus supplementation is critical. A mixture of 50 percent trace mineralized salt and 50 percent dicalcium phosphate supplied free choice to the cow herd will meet the phosphorus requirement. The salt mixture should be placed close to stock watering locations.

Vitamin A.

Lack of vitamin A may be a problem during fall and winter for cows that grazed drought-affected pastures during summer. Vitamin A is lacking in forages during drought and in hay produced from drought-affected forages. Cows should receive vitamin A and D booster shots approximately 30 days prior to calving and their calves should receive vitamin A and D at birth.

Protein.

Pastures dormant due to drought conditions may be deficient in protein. If these conditions occur during the breeding season, reductions in pregnancy rate can occur. Provide dry cows with approximately 0.5 to 0.75 pounds of supplemental crude protein and lactating cows with 0.9 to 1.2 pounds of supplemental crude protein per day. This can be fed as approximately 1 to 1.5 pounds of soybean meal for dry cows and 2 to 2.5 pounds of soybean meal for lactating cows. Protein supplementation may be necessary for optimum breeding rates during drought conditions. Alfalfa hay, sunflower meal, canola meal, distillers grains, as well as other protein meals may also be used as protein supplements.

Energy.

Since forage production is generally limited during a drought, energy may be the most limiting nutrient for grazing cattle. Several options are available for supplying energy to cattle on drought-stressed pasture. Hay, grain, and crop processing byproducts can all be used to supply energy to grazing cattle. Low quality forages can be ammoniated to increase digestibility and protein content.

Grain supplementation on pasture can result in a "catch 22". Providing supplemental grain can reduce forage digestibility, resulting in less energy available to the animal from available forage. As a general rule of thumb, up to 0.2 percent of body weight of supplemental grain per head per day will not result in large decreases in forage digestibility. For example, a 1,200 pound cow could receive 2.4 pounds of grain per day without drastically reducing forage digestibility. For some grains, processing may be necessary for optimum use by cattle. Corn and oats can be fed whole but may be better utilized if coarsely rolled before feeding. Barley and wheat should be coarsely rolled. It is desirable to crack the hull of barley so that rumen microorganisms and digestive enzymes can access starch in the kernel. Avoid fine grinding and rolling which results in excess fines and dust. These can result in increased incidence of acidosis and founder. In addition, extremely dusty supplements are unpalatable.

Grain processing coproducts, such as wheat midds, soyhulls, barley malt sprouts, beet pulp, and corn gluten

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feed, which contain highly digestible fiber provide energy while alleviating much of the negative impact that grain supplementation has on fiber digestibility. In addition, these byproducts provide protein which may also be limiting in drought-stressed forages.

Limiting Supplement Intake Using Salt. Intake of self-fed grain or protein supplements can be limited using salt. As a general rule of thumb, cattle will consume up to 0.1 percent of body weight in salt. Therefore, a 1,200 pound cow would consume 1.2 pounds of salt mixed in a grain or protein supplement. When using salt to limit intake, the percentage of salt added to the concentrate depends on the desired intake of concentrate.

Percent salt in the supplement = [pounds of salt/(pounds of concentrate+pounds of salt)] X 100.

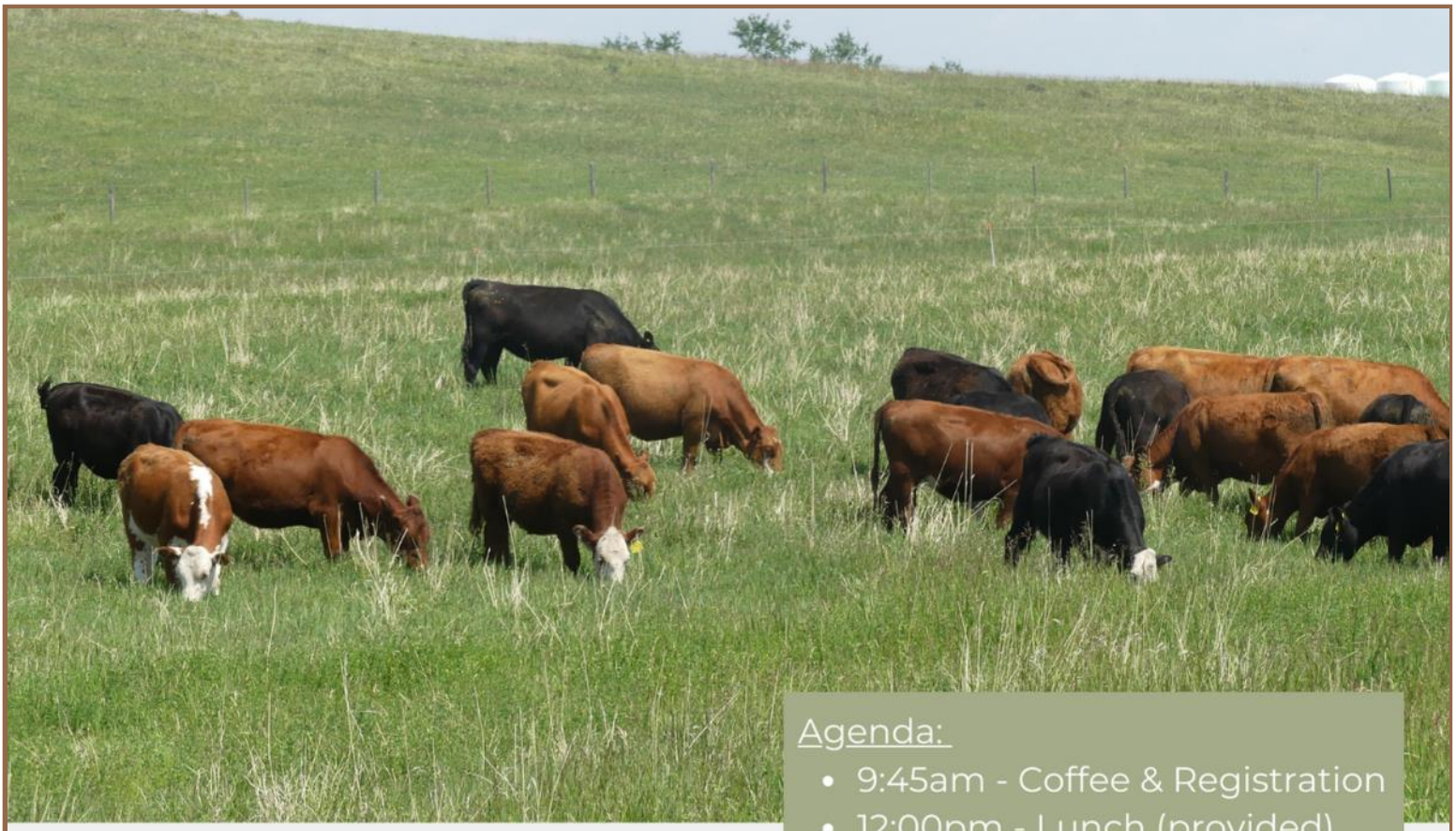
For example, to feed three pounds of salt-limited soybean meal supplement, use approximately 35 percent salt in the mixture. Salt intake would be approximately 1.1 pounds per day and soybean meal intake would be 1.9 pound per day. The salt mix used to limit intake should be 25 percent of the trace mineralized salt/dicalcium phosphate blend described above and 75 percent plain salt.

Be sure to monitor intake closely when feeding self limiting supplements, particularly grain based supplements, because founder and acidosis can occur. Adapt the cattle to the desired level of concentrate before introducing salt into the blend. Provide adequate water when using salt limiting supplements. Water intake will be higher than normal when feeding salt limited supplements. Salt can also corrode metal feeders. Salt-limited supplements should not be used with water sources high in total dissolved solids.

Drylot Feeding. If pasture conditions are extremely poor, producers may consider feeding cows in drylot. This may be more cost effective than supplementation if large amounts of supplement must be transported and fed to cows daily. In addition, it may allow pastures a much needed rest period to begin recovering from the drought.

Author: Greg Lardy

Original Article: https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/ag-hub/ag-topics/natural-resources-and-facilities/grazing-management/supplementing-cattle-drought



CATTLE HANDLING WORKSHOP

Chad Lundberg's Ranch
September 14, 2023
Instructor: Mike Sears

Cost:

FFGA Member: 25 / Non-Member: $30

Agenda:

- 9:45am - Coffee & Registration
- 12:00pm - Lunch (provided)
- 3:30pm - Wrap Up

Topics included:

- Cattle Behaviour & Flight Zones
- Low-Stress Handling
- Effective Herding Dynamics
- Hands-On Demonstration

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