

# Supplement Winter Cow Needs

11:30 a.m. session, Wednesday, Dec. 7, 2005

Presenter: Don Adams, University of Nebraska-North Platte

RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA (Dec. 7, 2005) — Supplements are generally known for their ability to maintain herd body condition during fall-winter grazing, but supplement applications are far-reaching, said Don Adams, University of Nebraska-North Platte Extension beef specialist, Wednesday during the 19th Range Beef Cow Symposium in Rapid City, S.D.

Protein supplements also have an effect on the cow's subsequent reproduction and her calf's eventual growth and performance, Adams said. Key to maximizing both is the producer's ability to understand the cow's nutrient requirements and the forage's ability to provide for such needs.

Some forages are limited in protein and energy, both important factors in late gestation or when a cow is lactating, Adams said. That's where supplementation and timing play a primary role in maintaining and improving nutritional status.

"There's just a tremendous opportunity if we can formulate our systems to fit our resources," he told attendees.

Adams reviewed the results of a study measuring the economic effect of an August vs. November weaning date in combination with protein supplement vs. no supplement. According to study analysis, calves from cows fed protein were heavier than calves from cows not fed protein. Supplemented cows had higher costs than nonsupplemented cows, and an August weaning system showed lower cow costs than a November weaning system.

The greatest net returns were for cows with calves weaned in August in combination with no protein supplement. However, as calves made their way through the feedlot, the study showed November-weaned calves from supplemented cows returned \$31.11 per cow more through the feedlot than calves weaned in August from supplemented cows.

"This is highly significant," Adams said. "The only thing different in those steer calves is the fact that their mother received 90 pounds (lb.) of protein during [December through February]. ... Something that we did before the calf was even born is affecting the steer."



**Nebraska beef specialist Don Adams offered insights as to how to match supplementation strategies to cow needs for optimal results. [PHOTO BY LYNN GORDON]**

Another study looked at wintering the calf with the cow on range and weaning it in April. According to Adams, the study showed the technique as a very promising way to cut costs for just 3 lb. of cubes per day to support a cow-calf pair.

Other outlined potential cost-saving supplementation strategies included seeking access to distillers' grains and tailoring the calving season to crop residue availability. Whatever the technique, the opportunities to incorporate supplements into systems is limited only by a producer's imagination, Adams noted.

"We have a tremendous amount of opportunity with the products that are available," he said. "We can look at our forage supplies; we can look at the kind of cows we got; we can look at our marketing objectives ... and if we can bring these supplements into play in a way that will meet the cow's needs, we can actually have a lot of flexibility. "

— by Crystal Albers, associate editor, Angus Productions Inc.  
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