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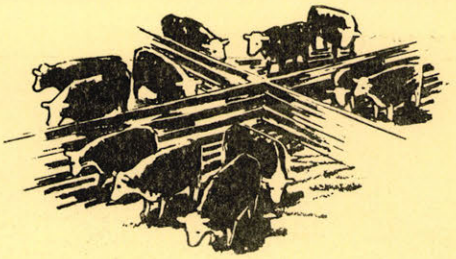

Range and Ranch ROUNDUP



February 2, 1977

IT ONLY HURTS WHEN WE LAUGH . . .

. . . and there has been little to even smile about these last couple of years, for cattlemen caught between low prices and dry skies. But I hope that right now you are standing beside your mailbox in a driving rainstorm, laughing hilariously that the Farm Advisor is writing about a drought that has already ended.

But . . . just in case we are still looking at bare ground, and just in case we still face the prospects of a dry spring, long summer and a fall with no feed carryover, let's bail water and try to save the ship. Most economists see a gradual, but steady, improvement in cattle prices in the coming months. So what can we do to weather the dry spell and stay in business until profits start pouring in again?

Maybe some of the following thoughts will help.

Don't Feed More Than Necessary

You have probably already culled deeper into your herd than you wanted to, but if you have to make further cuts, get rid of the least efficient ones first. Pregnancy test your cows and sell the open ones, since feed is too precious to use on freeloaders, especially if she is one of your older cows. Unhealthy or unsound animals should also be the first to go, even if their poor performance is a result of the drought.

When full or partial feeding is necessary, sort your cattle and feed them according to their needs. This will allow young cows to get their share and growing cattle to receive higher quality feed, leaving the rougher feed to older dry cows which can make better use of it.

You may need to wean your calves earlier than usual. A cow in milk requires half again as much feed as a dry one. If she gets shorted now, you will pay for it next year with fewer and lighter calves, (remember, the calf market is supposed to be better next year.) Letting your cow dry up early will cut her feed bill and let her take care of next year's calf.

Know How Much Feed They Need

The following table, taken from National Research Council data, lists daily requirements of digestible protein (DP) and total digestible nutrients (TDN) for representative classes of cattle to maintain weight (no gain). Requirements for other classes or rates of gain can be provided by your Farm Advisor or feed consultant. (As a rough rule of thumb, a gain of 3/4 lb. per day increases requirements for growing stock by 50%.)

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	Lbs. DP	Lbs. TDN	Lbs. Hay Equivalent To Meet Need
Growing steers or heifers			
400 lbs. wt.	.35	3.9	7.8
600 lbs. wt.	.47	5.4	10.8
800 lbs. wt.	.59	6.6	13.2
Cows (1,000 lbs. wt.) during			
mid-pregnancy	.42	8.0	16.0
late pregnancy	.51	9.3	18.6
early lactation	1.34	12.0	24.0

The following are recommended as minimums to maintain health. Your cattle will lose weight at these levels, and should not be left on these sub-maintenance rations except for short periods of time that will be followed by a period of ample feed.

Steers and open heifers			
400 lbs. wt.	.30	3.0	6.0
600 lbs. wt.	.41	3.9	7.8
800 lbs. wt.	.51	4.8	9.6
1,000 lb. cow during			
pregnancy	.56	5.2	10.4
lactation	1.12	10.4	20.8

And don't forget to provide enough water. During cool weather, and on dry feed, your stock can get by on about 8 gallons of water for each 1,000 lbs. liveweight. These needs are doubled as the thermometer approaches 100 degrees F.

Where Can They Get It?

By early February our foothill range usually will support cattle without further feeding. This year, the best we can hope for is that it will provide half of the maintenance needs, and many fields are so bare that even this is too much to expect. Since it is too early to move to irrigated pasture or mountain meadows, full or supplemental feeding is necessary.

In the tables above we indicated the amount of hay equivalent necessary to meet nutrient requirements. A good quality mixed grass-legume hay is adequate. Other equivalents would include: 1 part alfalfa to 2 parts cereal hay; or 1 part alfalfa to 1 part cereal straw, bean straw or dry range grass. One pound of grain or grain mix will replace 1½ lbs. of hay.

Liquid supplements and range blocks can also be used to advantage if minimum dry matter and roughage intake is provided. To maintain physiological functions, your cattle need about ½ lb. roughage or about 1 lb. total dry feed for each 100 lbs. of liveweight.

Many crop by-products are edible and can provide part of your cattle feed, but should be considered cautiously. Compare them to conventional feeds on the basis of total cost per pound of TDN or DP fed. The bulky nature of most of these feeds make them unacceptable for light calves and lactating cows, but they can often be handled well by mature dry stock.

Keep your eye open for unexpected feed sources from farms in the valley. Because of reduced supplies of irrigation water, farmers will tend to use this precious commodity on higher-income crops. This may result in some crops, such as cereal grains and even hay fields, being abandoned to grazing or green chop instead of being harvested in the usual manner.

How Should You Give It To Them?

If you still have some grass left, your choice of supplements should reflect not only purchase price, but also feeding costs such as labor and facilities (troughs, corrals, etc.) You should also consider whether your supplemental feed makes the best use of whatever range feed you have left.

Liquid supplements save labor but may be impossible to distribute everywhere needed. Range blocks can be distributed horseback and require minimum facilities, but are a more expensive TDN source than hay or grain. Purchase costs of both TDN and DP may be lower in hay, but labor requirements are increased and there is considerable waste unless mangers are used.

Control their intake of dry feeds by limiting the amount you provide, rather than with salt. Salt will increase water requirements, and that may be in shorter supply than feed. Feeding every third day instead of daily is advised. Because more feed is available at one time, younger and more timid stock stand a better chance of getting their fair share. And on the off days, cattle tend to spread out and do a better job of foraging rather than hanging around the feeding grounds.

On The Range Or In A Corral?

If all of your grass is gone and you are forced into full feeding you may want to confine, or at least restrict, your cattle. This will reduce their maintenance requirements by about 10% and cut down on feeding labor. But it also presents problems. The possibility of disease transmission is increased, especially if hay is fed on the ground. Social problems may develop, such as increased fighting and failure of newborn calves to mother up to the right cow. And facility costs are higher. The following minimums should be provided.

	Cow	Yearling
Pen space, sq. ft.*	300	150
Feed trough, linear inches	24-30	12-15
Water trough, linear inches	4	3
Water capacity, gal./hd./day	12	8

* If you feed on the ground, double the pen and feeder space shown above.

Should you haul the feed to the cattle or the cattle to the feed? It may be better to move your cattle rather than frequently haul large quantities of bulky feed long distances, especially if feeding will be required for an extended period.

Keep Them Healthy

When livestock are put in a short feed situation, the door is opened to more health problems than well-fed animals have. Poor health in turn decreases feed efficiency, so a cycle may be set up that only you can break.

One of the first concerns is the increased hazard from poisonous plants. When feed is abundant most of these toxic plants go untouched, and what little is eaten is diluted by the large quantity of good feed consumed, so no problem develops. But a cow with an empty belly may try to fill it on whatever is available, especially if that is green. Then the trouble starts. Of special concern this time of year would be Tree Tobacco, usually found along stream beds, and Buckeye trees when they start putting out new leaves.

Parasites, both internal and external, can also compound your animals' problems. Be alert for tick and lice outbreaks this time of year and horn flies as the weather warms up, which can rob your cattle of strength they can't afford to spare. Internal parasites, such as stomach, intestinal and lung worms, can be especially debilitating and should be treated for if you have reason to suspect an infestation.

Resistance to communicable diseases can also be lower in a poor nutritional state, so don't neglect your immunization program. Consult your veterinarian about these and other herd health problems.

Take Advantage of Financial Assistance

By the time you read this, Fresno County will probably have been declared a disaster area by President Carter and be eligible for some federal assistance. Details are not clear at this point, but don't get your hopes up. Substantial assistance for the efficient cattleman looks pretty remote.

What may help you more in the long run is the tax treatment available for drought sales of livestock. As last year, excess sales of breeding cattle due to the drought are not taxable if the money is reinvested in like stock by the end of the second tax year following the date of sale. This is described on page 50 of the Farmer's Tax Guide, 1977 Edition, available at the Farm Advisors Office or from the Internal Revenue Service.

New this year, and described on page 22 of that booklet, is a provision for delaying the reporting of income from sales of calves and feeders in excess of normal, non-drought sales. This applies only to areas designated by the Federal government as eligible for assistance. Your accountant can advise you concerning these measures.

Then Grin And Bear It

There is not much we can do to make it rain, but we can try to keep our head above water. The foregoing has been just a summary of things to consider. If we can help you with details of some of these subjects, please let us know.

Sincerely,

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