

# The Latest Across the Plains

## Unused Feed

“Agriculture is the most healthful, most useful and most noble employment of man.”  
— George Washington

## What's New in the Industry

Rapid snow melt, combined with rain fall and ice jams, has caused record breaking flooding in parts of the nation's heartland. The flooding has left many cattlemen scrambling to move livestock out of flood waters and to find feed resources.

Donations to help those affected by the flooding can be made to the following organizations:

Nebraska and Western Iowa: American Red Cross

Ag and Livestock: Nebraska Cattlemen's Disaster Relief Fund, Nebraska Farm Bureau Disaster Assistance

## Save Money \$\$\$ Test Your Feeds

Tests are relatively inexpensive, usually costing less than \$18 for the information derived. Contact our office to set up an appointment to have us pull feed samples if we have not done so yet.

## Beef Facts

- ◆ 1 farmer feeds 165 people annually. In 1960 1 farmer fed 26 people.
- ◆ 36.5 million calves were born in 2018 in the United States alone.

## Timely Reminders

- ◆ Keep pens box scraped.
- ◆ Haul manure whenever possible.
- ◆ Have your calving facilities and OB equipment ready.
- ◆ Have the right mineral for your cows' stage of production.
- ◆ Prepare now so your Hi-mag and Fly control minerals are on hand.
- ◆ Semen check bulls and make sure they are in adequate body condition.
- ◆ If you are in a high anaplasmosis area, begin talking to your vet now about a VFD.
- ◆ Target a BCS of 5.0-5.5 on mature cows and 5.5-6.0 on heifers at calving.
- ◆ Be sure to adjust cow nutrition to match requirements as they calve.
- ◆ Make sure waterers are clean and in good working order.
- ◆ Decide which implant you will use on calves.

## Calendar of Events

- **Mar 26 - 28** Wisconsin Public Service Farm Show, Oshkosh, WI
- **March 28** Eastern Oklahoma Beef Cattle Summit, McAlester, OK
- **March 29-31** Cattle Raisers Convention, Fort Worth, TX
- **March 31- Apr 1** Raising Meat: A New Food Economy Summit, College Station, TX
- **April 2-4** NCBA Legislative Conference, Washington, D.C.
- **April 4-6** Oklahoma City Farm Show, Oklahoma City, OK
- **April 9-11** National Institute for Animal Agriculture Annual Conference, Des Moines, IA
- **April 10-12** Great Bend Farm and Ranch Expo, Great Bend, KS
- **April 11-12** Plains Nutrition Council, San Antonio, TX
- **Apr 15-16** Montana Nutrition Conference and Livestock Forum, Bozeman, MT



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## Feedlot Profitability Tips from GPLC Consultants

All feedlot managers know that when it comes to feeding cattle there are certain factors that cannot be controlled. Weather, cattle prices and feed prices are never a certainty. So, what are some things that can be done that directly impact feedlot profitability?

### **Dr. Ki Fanning**

You lose 28% of your performance when mud is hock deep. If possible, cattle need to be kept in pens allowing for dry hides whether that is in a building or in an open yard. In an open yard, pens should be shaped so that moisture will flow out the back of the pen. Box scrape regularly so the pen surface is smooth and will shed water efficiently. Snow should be removed from the surface as soon as possible to maintain a dry surface. In a bedded building, your gauge on the amount of bedding to use and when to clean out the bedding is your cattle's hide. Frequency of bedding will change according to outside humidity and temperature (increased water intake in heat), size of the cattle and roughage level of the ration. Remember: water intake is directly correlated with feed intake so we want to maximize both to maximize performance. A windbreak in the summertime will reduce performance 0.26 lb/head/day. What does not affect the amount of bedding used is the wetness of the ration or the type of supplement fed.

### **Dr. Dan Larson**

The collection and evaluation of data. There are many excellent options for collecting feedlot data including feeding, animal health and marketing. Collecting these data are however only half the equation. After you have the data, you must evaluate and be willing to make changes, even if those changes are painful. This is the only way to make meaningful and progressive changes.

### **Luke Miller, M.S.**

Take advantage of technologies that offer a consistent return on investment. Today's profit margins are extremely slim. The added efficiencies that implants, ionophores, beta agonists, etc. offer could easily be the difference between staying in the black or going into the red. If cattle are being marketed through an All-Natural program, be sure the premiums outweigh the loss in performance that will be associated with it.

### **Dr. Jason Warner**

Managing shrink on feed ingredients. Shrink is one of those underlying costs to an operation that is often overlooked and forgotten about since it is not a direct cash expense, but one that adds up quickly. Shrink needs to be measured (tons in vs. tons out) and managed for all operations and feeds, regardless if you custom feed someone else's cattle or feed your own cattle. Knowing what amount of shrink can have a significant impact on an operation's bottom line and helps prevent under or over-buying commodities.

### **Dr. Karl Harborth**

Receiving cattle management. Morbidity can quickly take the profits out of a pen of cattle. The longer a calf takes to eat or drink after arrival the greater the probability they are to get sick. Getting calves to consume a nutrient dense starter ration and water as fast as you can after arrival will give calves the best chance of starting in the right direction. In addition to providing a high-quality starter ration, work with your veterinarian to have the proper vaccination program and disease management plan in place to handle any problems you may encounter based on the season and the type of cattle you are feeding.

### **Chris Muegge, M.S.**

Proper mixer maintenance and feedstuff inclusion. We work very hard to harvest, store, and purchase quality feedstuffs. If our mixer is not doing an adequate job or we are mixing feedstuffs out of order, we will end up delivering a different ration throughout the bunk. Work with your nutritionist to ensure ingredients are mixed correctly and sample total mixed rations routinely.

### **Adam Schroeder, M.S.**

Proper bunk management. Delivering just the right amount of the correct ration at a consistent time each day can pay big dividends through improved feed conversion. Goals should be that feeding time varies no more than 15 minutes from day to day, and bunks should be slick to crumbles a few hours before feeding time each day.

### **Dr. Matt Luebbe**

Starting cattle on feed requires attention to detail before the animals are received at the feedyard. Having the history of the cattle from the source is ideal to optimize the process but many times the source is unknown. When feeding high-risk calves additional thought needs to go into the receiving program. The first priority is to get the animals to consume feed and water. Many calves are not familiar with wet by-products or fermented feeds, providing long-stem hay may be required for the first few days to ensure they are familiar with the feed and locate the bunk.

### **Robert Jones, M.S.**

Sound economical decisions are only made on what we can measure, therefore it is crucial that a feedyard keep complete and accurate records. When facing hard economic times and narrow profit margins a feedlot must step back and evaluate the





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whole operation and find where the inefficiencies lie. Cattle intakes, feed purchases, feed waste, health costs, etc. all play into the cost of gain and bottom-line the breakeven for cattle in the feedlot. One factor that has the potential to bring in most of the profit for a feedlot comes from timely and wisely marketing cattle (buying/selling); knowing an accurate cost of gain and breakeven allows a feedlot to make sound decisions when doing so.

## Jordan Burhoop, M.S.

Be open to new ideas and try not to get stuck in the rut of doing a task a certain way just because that is how it has always been done in the past. Reasons for making a certain decision may no longer be relevant to the operation. New products coming to market and research being published force a producer to evaluate their current practices to ensure profit is being maximized.

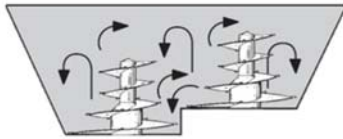
## Dr. Jeremy Martin

Feeding cattle comes down to process management. There are numerous processes in the feedyard, such as mixing feed, putting feed in the bunk, pen maintenance and processing calves. In order to give cattle the consistency they crave, you need to identify those key processes and develop standard operating procedures to ensure your crew is producing repeatable results.

## Feed Mixing 101

Mixing feed is a key quality control point in cattle feeding operations, with the goal being to deliver a consistent ration across the entire bunk every time. Improperly mixed feeds can cause variable cattle performance and intake patterns. Common mixing errors that occur are overloaded mixers, improper mixing times and incorrect loading sequence of ingredients. The order in which you load your ingredients is dependent upon the type of mixer used.

Figure 1. Vertical Mixer

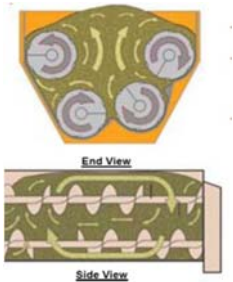


There are two basic types of mixers: vertical and horizontal. Vertical mixers have a large screw in the middle (Figure 1) and are designed to handle high forage rations commonly fed by cow/calf producers. Vertical mixers have the ability to process hay bales prior to mixing feed; however, processing hay in a vertical mixer takes a significant amount of time and fuel, making it very inefficient. Since well-balanced rations are not formulated around full bales, the correct

amount of hay needs to be added to the mixer initially for the batch being made, or the hay needs to be processed and the extra removed prior to adding other ingredients. Forages need to be processed to a particle size ranging from 0.5 to 2.0 inches long to prevent sorting. Wet feeds should be added next to hold the dry forage down (Table 1). The final ingredients that should be added are grains and balancer, followed by liquids. The weight of the vertical mixer is one of its biggest drawbacks. It can be nearly impossible to pull into wet pastures during the spring. Most vertical mixers can be retrofitted for truck tires which gives you more clearance.

Table 1. Vertical Mixer Load Order
Dry Hay
Water (if necessary)
Wet Feeds
Silage
Dry grains/Premixes
Liquids

Figure 2. Horizontal Mixer



Horizontal mixers consist of two to four blending augers (Figure 2) and are designed to handle higher grain rations. Grains should be the first ingredients loaded into a horizontal mixer, followed by the balancer (Table 2). This allows for a premixing of the balancer and grain prior to the addition of dry forages and wet feeds.

In all cases mixers should be allowed to mix for 5 minutes after the last ingredient has been added and prior to feeding. This can be done on the way to the first pen. Watch the time to make sure you are allowing for a full 5 minutes. Additionally, it is important not to overload your mixer beyond its capabilities, no more than 80% full. Overloading a mixer can cause dead spots which prevents the feed from mixing.

Table 2. Horizontal Mixer Load Order
Dry Grains/Dry Premixes
Dry Hay
Silage
Wet Feeds
Liquids

Servicing of the feeding equipment should be done regularly to maintain good mixability, accurate weighing, and good appearances. Scales should be calibrated monthly and the interior of the mixer box should also be inspected and cleaned monthly.

Safety should always be considered when working with any piece of equipment. Never attempt to dislodge feed jams while the mixer is still running. Safety shields (i.e. PTO shields) should always remain in place to prevent entanglements.

The loading sequences given in this article are general recommendations, they may not suit every operation. If you would like assistance setting up a mixer study to verify the accuracy of your mix or information on which brand of mixer would best suit your needs, please contact one of our consultants.



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