

COW/CALF CORNER

The Newsletter

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Adapted by Dr. Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Animal Reproduction Specialist from Dr. Rick Rasby, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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By Dr. Glenn Selk, OSU Extension Animal Reproduction Specialist

Feeding Moldy Hay

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Feeding moldy hay to livestock is a tough decision. All hay contains some mold, but when mold becomes noticeable the decisions become important.

Usually, mold makes hay less palatable, which can result in lower intake or in animals refusing to eat the hay. Poor weight gains or loss in body condition may result from the lack of nutrient intake. Many other problems from mold occur because of mycotoxins produced by certain mold fungi. This also is part of the decision problem since not all molds produce mycotoxins and the amount produced by those that do is unpredictable.

Direct negative affects of moldy hay are difficult to document. Horses may be more sensitive to mold than other livestock. For instance, mold spores often contribute to respiratory and digestive problems like colic or heaves in horses. Cattle apparently are less affected by mold, but certain molds can cause mycotic abortions or aspergillosis. Aspergillosis is an infection caused by the fungus *Aspergillus* that usually affects the lungs.

People, too, can be affected by mold spores which cause a condition called "farmer's lung" where the fungus actually grows in lung tissue. So try to avoid breathing in many of these spores.

The best course of action often is to minimize feeding moldy hay to more sensitive animals, like horses or pregnant cows. This may require a keen eye or sensitive nose when selecting hay to feed each day. Mixing moldy hay with other feedstuffs can dilute problems sometimes, but be

careful that you don't make your animals sick by tricking them into eating bad hay that they normally would refuse.

Mold is a difficult problem to deal with. Common sense and good observation often are your best decision aids. Source: Dr. Rick Rasby, Extension Beef Specialist, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Beef Cattle Production Timely Topic <http://beef.unl.edu/stories/200212100.shtml>

Growing Bred Replacement Heifers

By Dr. Glenn Selk

Bred replacement heifers that will calve in January and February need to continue to grow and maintain body condition. Ideally, two year old heifers should be in a body condition score 6 (see heifer pictured below) at the time that their first calf is born. This allows them the best opportunity to provide adequate colostrum to the baby, repair the reproductive tract, return to heat cycles, rebreed on time for next year, and continue normal body growth. From now until calving time, the heifers will need to be gaining about 1 pound per head per day, assuming that they are in good body condition coming out of fall and going into winter.



Heifers will need supplemental protein, if the major source of forage in the diet is bermudagrass or native pasture or grass hay. If the forage source is adequate in quantity and average in quality (6 - 9% crude protein), heifers will need about 2 pounds of a high protein (38 - 44% CP) supplement each day. This will probably need to be increased with higher quality hay (such as alfalfa) or additional energy feed (4 to 6 pounds of 20% range cubes) as winter weather adds additional nutrient requirements. Soybean hulls or wheat midds may also be used to insure adequate energy intake of pregnant heifers.

Wheat pasture (if adequate rainfall produces growth) can be used as a supplement for pregnant replacement heifers. If wheat pasture is used for bred heifers, use it as a protein supplement, not as the entire diet. Some producers report that 1 day on wheat pasture and two days on native or bermuda (with access to grass hay when needed) will provide the protein supplement needed. This encourages the heifers to go rustle in the warm season pasture for the second day, rather than just stand by the gate waiting to be turned back in to the wheat. What ever method is used to grow the pregnant replacement heifers, plan to have them in good body condition by calving so that they will grow into fully-developed productive cows.

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