

Not All Feeds are Created Equal!

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Increased cost of inputs seems to be a never ending problem for agriculture producers. For livestock producers during the winter months, those costs directly translate into the cost of animal nutrition. Crop producers are finding it more imperative, as input cost rise – i.e. - fertilizer, to test the soil in their fields. Test results are used to determine the proper, or agronomic, amount of nutrients to apply for the intended crop.

Livestock producers have a similar issue. Margins between the expenses in, compared to the income realized from animal sales, never seem to widen enough, or for very long. Considering the cost of time, energy, and fuel if you have to haul feed to your animals, plus the cost of the feed itself; is it really cost efficient to NOT know if you are over feeding or underfeeding your animals? Putting feed into animals for production efficiency is really not that much different than fertilizing your soil to efficient crop production.

The accepted rule of thumb is that an animal should eat between 2.5 and 3.0 percent of its body weight in dry matter per day. In the case of a 1000 pound cow, that would be 25 to 30 pounds of dry matter, which translates into approximately 28 to 33 actual pounds of feed. Feedstuffs will vary in nutrient content depending on maturity of the plant at harvest, weather conditions during growth and at harvest, and (yes) fertility of the soil. Timothy hay for example varies from 6 percent protein in the seed stage to 14 percent in the late vegetative stage. Range grasses may vary from 4.7 percent protein in the winter to 11 percent in early summer (Agriculture National Research Council. 1996). Those are just examples of the changes in ONE nutrient!

The same 1000 pound cow we mentioned earlier, although she does not have more than a 1 to 2 pound variation in her dry matter requirements in a year, requires almost twice as much protein after calving to as she requires mid-year (Agriculture National Research Council. 1996). The [Cattlemen's Library](#), has several fact sheets to help producers with their feed testing questions listed in the "Nutrition" section.

Board of Agriculture National Research Council, Committee on Animal Nutrition, Subcommittee on Beef Cattle Nutrition. (1996). Nutrient Requirements of Beef Cattle. National Academy Press. Washington, D.C.