

MAKING INFORMED NUTRITION MANAGEMENT DECISIONS

Katie Mason, Assistant Professor and Beef Extension Specialist, Department of Animal Science

Beef cattle spend much of their lives grazing pasture, and, especially in the Southeast, forage is available for grazing many days out of the year. However, there are times when cattle may need to be supplemented or fed, specifically when there is a forage or nutrient deficit or when greater animal performance is desired. Supplementation and feeding programs are not the same for every cattle operation. There are many factors at play including forage quality, class and stage of production of cattle, labor and facilities, and accessibility and economics of feedstuffs.

Extension agents and specialists can make more informed decisions and recommendations if provided with detailed information about the cattle to be fed and forages or feeds to be used. Below is a list of questions to help guide nutrition program decision-making.

Cattle Information

- What is the class of livestock? (E.g., brood cows, stockers, replacement heifers, bulls, etc.)
- What is their body weight?
 - Current and target weight
 - Rate of gain desired, if applicable
- What is the stage of production? (E.g., months of gestation or lactation, growing, finishing, etc.)

Hay Information

- Do you have a forage analysis results for hay/baleage/silage to be fed in ration?
 - *This is the single most important piece of information when it comes to balancing rations.*
 - Ensure that this analysis is for the forage that is currently being fed/desired to be fed. Hay differs by lot and should be tested as such.



Commercial cattle eating hay. Credit: Alabama Extension, CCO, via Wikimedia Commons

Feed Information

- What feeds do you typically use?
- What feedstuffs do you have access to? Or what feeds are available at your local feed store?
 - Do you have an analysis for any of these feeds?

Feeding Management

- How often can you feed? (E.g., daily, twice a day, every other day, etc.)
- Do you have a way to process (chop, grind, mix, etc.) feed?
- Do you feed forage and concentrate/by-products separately or as a total mixed ration?



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