

2013-14 Wintering costs for Lake City Research Center

Doug Carmichael and Jason Rowntree

- **2013-14 winters feed intake averaged 29.2 pounds of dry matter for the cow herd.**
- **Winter feed costs are at \$2.21 per cow per day.**
- **Winter daily gains for calves averaged 1.54 pounds per day.**

Introduction

At Lake City Research Center the winter was long and a lot of snow for 2013-14. The feed intake was pretty consistent, but with hay prices at an all-time high our costs have been more than expected. In 2013-14 we purchased the majority of our feed with an average feed cost of \$113 per ton. With feed costs being the major costs in any operation, our wintering costs are at the forefront of cow calf costs. Our strategy for 2014-15 winters will be to graze longer if the weather permits. If we have moisture enough to graze into November and possibly December we will extend our season and weaning. One of the decisions made for 2014 is that we will plan to wean when we come off of pasture to reduce our feed costs and improve gains on the calves. The longer we can utilize our cows and calves on pasture the more economical we should be at Lake City. Our flesh score for the cowherd as of the fall of 2013 was 5.5 with a weight of 1196 pounds at a frame score of 4.7.

Results

In the fall of 2013 we began feeding hay on the 18th of October of 2013 due to dry conditions at Lake City throughout the summer. It was so dry we fed the cows and heifers in the beginning of September for 11 days. This gave the pastures a chance to rejuvenate into the fall with the moisture that we received late in the summer or early fall. In the fall of 2013 we were carrying 96 cows to calve in the spring of 2014 with 56 bred heifers.

Our feed costs per cow in the last two years have gone up considerably based on the price of hay. In the fall months of 2013 we averaged dry matter intake of 27.74 pounds of hay. We limit feed the hay based on need and body condition score. Body condition scores are officially taken in the fall of every year and we use a general assessment of the cows the rest of the year to determine grazing and hay needs. Our costs in the fall averaged in the range of \$1.50 to \$1.90 per day depending on the type and quality of the hay.

Mid-Winter costs (Jan-March) reflect a higher cost in hay for this period and a higher consumption in dry matter also. Our costs for this period were in the range of \$1.80-\$2.07, again depending on the type and quality of the hay. In January we had an intake of 29.93 of dry matter. In February the condition of the cows was in decline and we upped the dry matter to 36 pounds per day. Part of the increase in February's intake was because of the colder weather and feeding some marginal hay that was used for bedding as well as feed. In March the dry matter was decrease as the cows BCS improved. Dry matter intake for March was 26.24 reflecting an overall better condition on the cows. In the last trimester of pregnancy as the cows get closer to

calving we try and feed better quality hay as to not short the calf during gestation. The calves that are well taken care of in the last trimester will be better performing when they hit the ground.

Spring hay costs this last year have been excessive, reflecting the increased cost of hay and the colder spring than normal. Our hay cost was in the range of \$3.35-3.54 per day per animal. In April and May dry matter intake was from 26 to 32 pounds. With our calving starting in April, our feed intake will vary greatly in this time period. This past spring we fed until the 18th of May, the latest we have ever feed hay in the spring at Lake City Research Center.

Winter Calf Management

At Lake City we are still working at perfecting the grass fed wintering of steers with hay. We come to realize that the NDF value of our hay plays a large part of getting the gains we need to finish. In the fall of 2013 we weaned off steers at 457# actual. Our weights were down slightly from previous years due to the dry weather and weaning early. We were able to pasture the weaned animals until November 1st.

On the first of November the steers were started on dry hay and high moisture balage. During the first three months of adjustment to the new feed the steers gained 1.45 pounds per day and ended up weighting 591.90 pounds on January 2nd.

	<u>Weight</u>	<u>Lbs/Day</u>
February	631.21	1.23
March	699.82	1.95
April	742.35	1.61
May 14	760.17	0.25

In May our average starting weight onto pasture was at 760.17 pounds per animal.

The hay fed this last year was a combination of first cutting dry hay, second and three cutting alfalfa baleage. Our gains on the majority of the year are in direct correlation to the NDF and the palatability of the hay. Some of the second cutting hay was too coarse and reduced intake. With our hay not as ideal as expected, we adapted with what was available on the market. In May we ran out of second and third cutting alfalfa resulting in a drastic cut in performance.

On performance of varying types of hay, there was a significant difference on the gains and costs. The third cutting that cost \$228 per ton had better gains on cost per pound than the \$180 per ton gains. These gains were in the month of February, which was colder but still resulted in an increase in dry matter intake. The higher quality hay had a NDF of 36.5, crude protein of 21.5, and energy of .73. The second cutting that we fed the previous month had an NDF of 45.1 and a crude protein of 20.1, energy of .71. With the majority difference in quality being in the NDF, the other major points of energy and protein being similar.

Summary

At Lake City we will continue to try and graze as long as possible. The cost savings per acre of grazing to feeding hay for us is a lot less than it costs to feed hay to the cow herd. The

advantages of grazing to hay is significant enough to focus most of our energies on grazing vs. haying. Hay costs this year will be up higher than last year at Lake City. Grass fed calve costs are continuing to rise with the cost of hay and land. At Lake City we plan to graze the calves on the cows longer to gain on the average daily gain that a calf will get on his mom vs. hay. When we do feed hay, high quality with low NDF has been getting us the best gains per pound of feed and at the lowest cost.