

Winter supplement program can be grazing tool

Beef producers in the Southwest are commonly challenged to balance forage supply and demand on their grazing operations.

While typically not documented, a tenured manager is always aware of the grazing use patterns within and across pastures on a ranch. Regardless of the year, most managers would like to get more grazing days out of a given pasture by improving grazing utilization in those areas not commonly preferred by cattle.

Pasture attributes (i.e. distance to water, slope, cross-fencing, shade/wind cover, and grass species composition, etc.) coupled with the grazing behavior of cattle provide the basis for grazing use patterns across pastures.

Undoubtedly, water developments and cross-fencing provide managers long-term solutions to improve grazing distribution by cattle.

However, evaluating how, when, where, and what type of supplements are delivered to cattle can provide

lower-cost opportunities to change grazing behaviors, subsequently producing more grazing days and reducing overuse (i.e. grazing and loafing) of conveniently located

grazing areas within a pasture.

Training cattle

A key principle to using supplements as a grazing management tool is to establish a training period to help cattle acquire a taste of the commercial supplement and understand the delivery or placement system. We've had the best success using a two-week training period. The importance of breaking cattle to the supplement and delivery system cannot be overemphasized.

Identify underused areas

Identifying underutilized areas within a pasture and

supplementing in these areas will benefit cattle by meeting nutritional deficiencies and also extend the grazing resources by extending the perimeter of grazing between water and the site of supplementation.

Delivering cattle

Our data and experience suggest the most effective time during the day to deliver cattle to underutilized areas for supplementation is the period after daily watering and before the cattle begin to graze in the late afternoon. The later in the day cattle are delivered to the desired grazing areas the more grazing and overall time cattle will spend in these areas.

Supplement type

The type of nutrient delivered in relation to nutrient availability in the grass and the nutrient requirements of the cattle will impact the effectiveness of this strategy. In addition, self-fed supplements result in more total visits per week and greater grazing use in underutilized areas than those supplements delivered multiple times per week by truck or horseback (i.e. hand-fed).

Will this concept work on

your operation? The simple answer is if you want it to work, it will. This concept will not be as effective if 100 percent of the crew is not on board from the get-go.

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