



# ON FEED

A newsletter of Dakotaland Feeds

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## Backgrounding and Bunk Sheets

In a year like this, with low corn prices, it makes sense to try to use some of your own grain and market it through your calves. It has been said that cattle feeding was the original value-added program.

With that in mind and tightening farm budgets, making sure your feed hits the target with the calves is even more important. **We always run your rations with the least-cost scenario**, but

within the constraints of meeting what the animal needs to hit your gain goals and targets. So if all we have is corn, that alone is not a successful feeding program for a variety of reasons- protein isn't high enough, calcium is inadequate, the calcium:phosphorus ratio is inverted, and with too much starch the cattle may get acidosis, laminitis, or worse. We need to blend that corn with some roughage, balance the minerals and meet their protein requirement to get them to gain.

Our rations are put through our balancing program to take all of the nutrients into account and balance the ration with the results from samples of your specific feeds. Many times, producers think in terms of pounds of delivered feed and your ration is balanced with that in mind so it makes sense to you when you look at approximate amounts. Other times, we balance the rations on percentages which gets us to the same place when we use the batch sheets. If your feed consultant gives you a ration based either on pounds or on percentages, the batch sheets are all run on percentages. We get the same end result either way when we follow the batch sheets. **Please follow the batch sheets.** Every time you decide to add more corn (or etc) other than what the batch of feed calls for, the ration is no longer 13% protein and 48 MCal of energy. Now it may be 11% protein and 56 MCal of energy and when you have problems, we can't figure out why because the ration SHOULD have been safe, but a little 'tweaking' means it isn't any more.

When starting calves, it is common for us to start by feeding the calves between 1.0-1.5% of their bodyweight on a dry matter basis. If your calves are roughly 500 lbs at weaning, then that would be 7.5 lbs of dry matter. If you take into account the moisture in your ration (say it is 30% moisture), then we would put 10.7 lbs of the feed as you would mix it per head in the bunk. From there, we want to **follow the batch sheets to increase feed deliveries**. If the calves are cleaning up the bunks and there is no feed left, we want to increase our total feed delivery by following the batch sheet to a higher total weight. If you have 100 head in a pen, and we increase them by 2.0 lbs/hd, then we would go to a batch that is 200 lbs more than the last feeding. Make sure the calves clean that up for at least 2-3 days before increasing feed deliveries again. Calves will likely top out around 3.0% of bodyweight on a dry matter basis.

We make the batch sheets in increments that allow you to make adjustments to your feed deliveries. Some producers feed once per day and some feed twice. Sometimes, pens are split after the calves are started and so batch sizes need to be different. Having the range on the batch sheet allows you as a producer to move those cattle to the amount of feed that is right for that group of calves. We can give you an estimate of where we think the cattle will fall for intake, but **intake is also influenced by weather conditions, pen conditions, water intake and other factors**. You need to read the cattle.

### In a Nutshell:

- \* **We run least-cost rations with constraints**
- \* **Please follow the batch sheets!**
- \* **When increasing feed deliveries, follow the batch sheet**
- \* **Intake is influenced by pen and weather conditions**
- \* **Watch feeding behavior and avoid cattle 'crashing the bunk'**
- \* **Observe the cattle to avoid 'corn harvest disease'**
- \* **Be a Feeder-Farmer instead of a Farmer-Feeder**

## BACKGROUNDING AND BUNK SHEETS

When it comes to reading the cattle, it is common for feedlots to take bunk scores every day prior to feeding to assess if they need to adjust feed deliveries for the day. With backgrounding cattle, that is probably less common and less methodical. We generally do not want the bunk to be slick for more than about 2-3 hours before the next feed delivery. If the cattle are out of feed for too long, then they are more likely to 'crash the bunk' and be very aggressive the next time feed is delivered. This can often be the cause of digestive upsets and bloats. On the other end of the spectrum, we do not want unconsumed feed to accumulate in the bunk. It is expensive because at some point it needs to be removed from the bunk. Feed that sits in the bunk for a long period of time loses quality and generates mold and makes it more difficult to assess if you should actually change the next feed delivery. A good rule of thumb is that at feeding time, 1/3 of the cattle should be coming to the bunk and ready to eat, another 1/3 should be getting up and interested in coming to the bunk, and the last 1/3 should be comfortable and not making their way to the bunk. When you see this kind of **feeding behavior**, it indicates that you are on track from a feed delivery and intake standpoint.

On your batch sheets, there is a column to the far right that shows the amount of dry matter delivered in each batch. When you go to switch rations, from your starter to your grower, find the pounds of dry matter delivered in the far right column. On your batch sheets for your grower ration, look in the far right column to find the dry matter amount that matches your last feed delivery of the starter and use that line to load your wagon. That way, even when moisture in the ration changes, your cattle will get the same amount of dry matter.

It is the busy season for everyone and when it comes to cattle, **try not to let the calves get 'corn harvest disease' if you can.** If you can have someone observe the cattle and look through them a few minutes a day, that can make a big difference to head off problems before they snowball. If you see some high-sided cattle, we can make ration adjustments before there are dead ones. If you see snotty noses, we can start medication before the whole pen gets sick. Even if it is your kids that check when they get off the bus, that is better than no one seeing the calves in the daylight until the next rain. And, it is a good opportunity to teach them what to look for. Be a FEEDER-FARMER instead of a FARMER-FEEDER. **One 650-lb steer is worth more than 350 bushels of corn.**

The fall has not been a great one for cattle (or harvesting). Remember that when you start these calves on feed, a little prevention goes a long way. Aureomycin is still a great tool to help head off respiratory disease. These calves had a rough spring too, so challenges now may not be tolerated very well because of their previous history and previous lung damage. Visit with your vet and get a VFD in place before you wean. It doesn't have to be that difficult. Hopefully the dry weather will help the cattle and the harvest. Stay safe.

*Roxanne Knock, PhD*

### Timely Tips:

- \* **Order your Stress Care for weaning-** planning ahead will help ensure you have it when you need it!
- \* Talk to your vet about getting a VFD if you want to use Aureomycin at weaning time
- \* Implant calves during backgrounding to get the best gain and efficiency
- \* Get **30-13 tubs** for grazing corn stalk residue
- \* Remember to HEAT TAPE lines on liquid systems- this keeps the line fluid. C&R Supply has videos on how to maintain the John Blue pumps at <http://www.crsupply.com/index.php/products/liquid-feed/>
- \* Get your forages tested for quality and have your Feed Consultant set up starting/growing rations
- \* Set up a herd health plan for vaccinations, de-worming program, and treatment protocols with your veterinarian
- \* Inventory your projected feed resources and project your winter feed needs so you can plan accordingly
- \* Pregnancy check cows and decide on a strategy to sell or feed them- implant them if you decide to fatten them