



# Beef Briefs

## The Latest Information on Beef Cattle Nutrition



### With The Many Challenges, We Are Pressed To Make Changes By: Jack McCoubrey

Each of us are counting our bales and calculating our stored feeds, with 14-16 weeks until pasture time, many farmers I have communicated with are good, some are not, and numerous will need to buy something to get them to the green grass of 2013!

Hay prices have continued to rise, with common prices now at 12+ cents for good hay and straw is available at 7-8 cents. During these past couple of weeks producers that have extra oatlage are now selling it and there is fair demand.

Feeding our beef cows has changed, and changed dramatically. How creative and innovative beef guys have become, the story is amazing! We had early spring frosts that did a whole lot of damage to our hay crops, then with the hay crop recovering, armyworms attacked in some areas, and this certainly wiped out a 1st and 2nd cut and took pastures with it. Then we have the drought and at the end of the day, with all that has happened during the growing season of 2012, most beef guys have 1/2 enough hay, and many had to feed it while on pasture. The outlook was bleak, to say the least.

So, the first course of action was, plant oats after wheat, or other forage crops, and how amazing the result has been. The yields were incredible, one producer called



me on a Saturday afternoon after he got done baling 200 acres, he said, "Jack, I have laid awake at night wondering/worrying about feed for my cows, as of today, I'll sleep sound all night tonight, we have more than we need, 8-10 bales per acre, thank you for stopping that day in July". This story was repeated many times over, thousands of acres of oats were planted, harvested late November and some even into early December, many producers secured an abundance of winter feed, oatlage!

I am sure we have learned much from this experience, we are going to do this again, this will/has

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With The Many Challenges, We Are Pressed To Make Changes

By: Jack McCoubrey

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become part of our feed management program for the future. Many producers chopped silage, and bagged or bunched it, an acre of corn silage will feed a whole lot of cows. Many baled anything that could be baled or chopped; soybean straw, edible bean straw, wheat straw, oat/barley straw, many baled corn stalks, and with all this stuff, how are we going to feed it?

Feeding our beef cows has surely changed and we may never go back to once a day putting a bale of hay in the hay feeder, surely simple, didn't take much time, the easy way. My nephew and I discussed back in Sept/Oct, about the challenges ahead, and he said, *"it's awfully easy to feed a bale a hay a day"*, I says, *"Junior, we are now going to have to work at it a bit"*, we both agreed that I was right. We have a multitude of 'stuff' collected together, thinking we'll feed it, some that we know our cows will never touch, scruff through it and then lay on it, some, that is too high powered (my 3rd cut balage, 23% protein) to feed.

Believe it, we are experiencing a revolution in beef cow feeding, many have been doing it for years, most of us looked at the capital costs as too great, well, we have arrived, the TMR! As I stop at a producer's just prior to Christmas, he was coming out of the cornstalk field after feeding his beef cows with his TMR, I asked what he was feeding, he says, *"well, right or wrong, we are mixing 1200 lbs of edible bean straw with 800 lbs of wet distillers"*. I checked the mix, seemed good enough for me to eat, checked with our nutrition department and they tell me the mix could actually go to a 50/50, anyway, the guy's cows were in great condition, all were happy, and not a pound of 15 cent hay was being fed.

Brock Smith, Kenpal's new nutrition guy and myself the vintage Kenpal Beef Guy toured to numerous beef cow/calf guys.

The 1st, a 180 cow herd. The producer always fed hay, his crop was way short, he and I had many discussions regarding his feeding program. After some detailed research, he chopped 25 acres of silage, invested in a TMR and bunkline feeders. The mix of corn silage, 1st cut 6% hay, a few pounds of distillers, and mineral goes in the TMR. This producer is truly convinced that with just the savings on wasted hay from the hay feeders, and with the cost of hay the way it is, his investment was sound and good. I can surely tell you, his cows are in better condition than I have seen them, and his cost per day is far less then the 35-40 lbs of hay that he would have been feeding and buying at least 1/2 in.

The next producer we saw has 160 cows, and has used a TMR now for 10 years. He has a semi-dry lot all year long, his mix is cornstalks, wheat straw, ryelage, and a bit of DDG's with mineral in the mix. Brock and I looked at the bunk, looked at each other, *"are they eating this?"*, The response; bunks are empty by morning. This is a balanced ration, not the greatest looking, but it works, and his cow condition was perfect. His cost per day, 'LOW'!

Then to a 120 cow herd, they have always fed hay, in fact the guy is a hay dealer and feeds his 2nd rated hay to his cows, well, 2nd rated hay this year is worth a whole lot. So, at this operation, TMR has been discussed for a few years, but with the current circumstances, the move to a TMR has moved ahead a year or two. These guys mean business, with a new



cement pad for commodities, a bunkline feeder in place for cows, and a need to make changes for their feeder cattle. The mix on this day, straw, oat/barley/pea balage and a few pounds of corn, all feed was analyzed, and a balanced ration is in place. These cows are being fed better than ever before, and at less cost then ever before, but the long term capital investment had to be made. With this, I can see this cowherd will expand, feed costs will be less and cow condition will be better.

Our next stop was a 140 cow herd. The producer just bought a reconditioned big mixer and has a multitude of 'stuff' to mix and feed; cornstalks, soyabean straw, 2nd cut balage, 3-4 yr old hay, in fact this guy is having fun with all the recipes. We analyzed a mix and he is low on protein so he got a load of wet gluten in. The mix now is cornstalks, balage, corn silage and maybe the odd bale of old hay or soyabean straw, while adding 8 lbs of wet gluten feed. Mineral goes in the mix, cows like it, cows look great, with the best condition I have ever seen these cows in, they are happy.

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Our last stop, right here at the home farm, my story is typical of other Ontario beef cow/calf guys, I have always bought in 1/2 to 2/3 of my hay. I made up my mind that I would not, in fact I could not, the expense was immense and I could not recover the feeding costs with the sale of my calves, bulls and heifers. Buying hay in to feed my cows was out of the question. So, we baled what we had, got 3 cuts, rented 20 acres from my neighbour and planted oats, then, secured some seed corn and sweet corn by-product, invested in a bunker, and had all my feed in place. But, my 2nd and 3rd cut hay was too powerful to feed my cows, I have this bunker full of silage and I have double the wheat straw of normal years as I trade my neighbour for straw and he gets my manure.

Well, just happened, my guy that cuts and bales my hay has beef cows also, he has a whole lot of 'stuff' baled up, that he needs to get mixed to feed his beef cows. He and I discussed the TMR thing, he decided that he would buy one, based on the fact that I would get him to custom mix my 'stuff', well, the old saying is, "plan the work and then work the plan".

This works well for me, works well for him, he charges me 1.25 cents per pound to mix, our mix is 1000 lbs of straw, 1000 lbs of 3rd cut, 23%, and 4000 lbs of our so called silage, our mix analyzed at 11.5% protein. My cows are right condition, are happy, love what they are being fed, are calving without flaw, 35 calves from 33 cows as I write this (20/01/13). My per pound costs of feed is 5 cents, the mixing charge is in this. I feed approximately 60 lbs, this works well at \$3/day. If I was on straight hay as in the past and was buying it in, at 12-14 cents, 5-6 \$\$\$ per day.

The other observation we had, is my cows quit going to the mineral feeder for whatever reason, so the mineral is in the mix, they get their daily allotment in every feeding of Kenpal Beef Nurse Cow, that way I know they are getting the 150 grams per head per day they need!

With this, I had to make a capital investment in a bunker, I do pay a weekly mixing fee of 1.25 cents per pound, I am able to feed stuff that I would not be able to feed my cows before. I have been able to source some very low cost ingredients, and through feed samples, and good Kenpal nutritional input we have been able to feed a designed balanced ration to my cows. They like the feed, I am able to control condition, feed a balanced ration and knowing that each get their daily allotment of minerals and vitamins is important for sure! Better for it, for sure, I will never be going back to a straight hay program. I am feeding my cows for less, they are being better nourished, and I have complete control over intakes of feed and minerals.

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Numerous producers have secured ample oatlage, and are feeding this along with straw and the hay that they have. This is working well, much of the oatlage we have analyzed is in the 9-10% protein, while coming in at good feed values. There are many producers that baled corn stalks, some baled in a moist state and wrapped, these have ensiled and are working well in combination with what hay they have. Dry cornstalks are working in combination with hay, feeding on alternating days, while I baled a bunch, and we use it for the majority of our bedding needs.

For sure, producers are managing their feeds, hay feeders are now empty before the next bale is fed, some producers are supplementing with grain, others with a pelletized background ration, all seems to be working.

Producers that are now calving and through the winter months certainly need to manage their feeding regime differently then producers that will calve on grass. We need to keep our cows in good condition to successfully get these girls bred back in March, April and May. As we look around at our fellow beef guys, cows continue to go to market, feed costs are high, cattle prices are ok, but cropping returns are astounding.

Life is good in the cropping world, prices as never before in history, land values have increased multiple times, land rents are at an all time high. Why not sell the cows, rent the land to a cropper guy, plow the pastures and the hay, plant more corn? It is hard to debate the issue. But, we all know what goes around, comes around, and one of these days/years, mother nature will bless us with ideal weather and bumper crops, each of us know the result.

With the many challenges, we are pressed to make changes. We need to pasture more cows on less pasture. We need to harvest more hay per acre, we need to take advantage of a 2nd crop after wheat or rye. I planted rye in the fall, I'll harvest that and then plant sorghum/sudan or oats/peas/barley, some producers have been doing this for years, harvesting the ryelage, then planting soyabeans/silage corn. Those that planted oats/peas/barley this past summer seem to have had better yields than with just straight oats, while the protein level is a bit higher with the peas included. We need to harvest crop residues that will work as a fibre source as mentioned previously, cornstalks and beans straws, all can be used for bedding or feed. We need to think outside the box!

Let's start with analyzing our feeds, know what your feeding, and adjust to the mark. We need to maximize the yield per acre of our hay and pasture, we need to be soil testing, let's know what we need to do to get the most out of these crops. I know fertilizer is expensive, a covering of manure works well, we need to maximize. In my own case, I partner with my neighbour on a TMR, more producers need to look at similar partnerships.

Us beef guys, we have continued to believe in our enterprise, we will have our day, will have our year, maybe years, and through the challenges of 2012, I firmly believe we have become better, keeping an eye on cost and becoming far more efficient, we will benefit economically for years ahead from the 2012 experience, what a year it was!

BEEF GUY!

# WE APPRECIATE YOUR BUSINESS

Produced by:



69819 London Road, RR #1, Centralia, Ontario, Canada, N0M 1K0

Tel: (519) 228-6444 or 1-800-265-2904 • Fax (519) 228-6560 • Email [kpalen@kenpal.on.ca](mailto:kpalen@kenpal.on.ca) • [www.kenpal.on.ca](http://www.kenpal.on.ca)