
CORN OR HAY? WHICH IS THE BEST BUY WHEN PURCHASING FEED FOR THE BEEF HERD?

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When feed supplies are limited, beef producers are faced with the decision of which feeds to purchase. One question is whether to purchase hay or corn to meet the energy needs of cattle.

Energy is the feed nutrient that is needed in most quantity (except for water, which is assumed to be available). "Total Digestible Nutrients" (TDN) is the most convenient estimate of energy. On the average, it takes 9 pounds of hay to supply the same amount of TDN that 5 pounds of corn provides.

Therefore, in terms of energy, 5 pounds of corn can replace 9 pounds of hay, but is it economical?

If corn is selling at \$2.30 per bushel and there are 56 pounds of corn per bushel then simple division reveals that corn is selling for 4.1 cents/pound. Five (5) pounds of corn would cost 21 cents.

If hay is selling for \$80 per ton, the price per pound is 4 cents. But, it takes 9 pounds of hay to equal 5 pounds of corn. Multiply 9 pounds of hay X 4 cents per pound to show that the relative feeding value is 36 cents.

From this, one may conclude that it is more economical to substitute 5 pounds of corn in place of 9 pounds of hay in that the corn would cost 21 cents and the hay 36 cents to produce the

same TDN.

Additional points:

- Producers should use their own figures to make certain the same conclusion applies in their case. It may not. If hay was worth \$45 per ton in the above example, the cost would be approximately the same.
- Corn should not replace more than 50 percent of the forage in most cow-calf rations.
- Do not forget other nutrients, such as protein; for example some hay may be higher in protein, and therefore, more valuable to the producer.