

Feed Troughs Will Be Needed to “Stretch Hay”

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Feed troughs will be needed for cow-calf producers that are planning to “stretch” their hay supply this winter with corn or concentrate feeding. However, most Tennessee cow-calf producers do not have adequate “trough space” to get the job done.

When serving as a “hay stretcher,” corn or other concentrate feeds will need to be “limit fed.” This requires trough space for all the animals to eat at the same time during the feeding.

Table 1 presents trough space requirements for various classes of cattle when limited fed. Limit feeding of mature beef cows will require 24-30 inches of length and 18-30 inches in width.

Table 1. Trough Space Requirements For Various Classes of Cattle				
Classes of Cattle	Length	Width	Feed For Both Sides Width	Height at Throat
Cows	24-30"	18-30"	48"	24"
Yearlings	18-24"	18"	48"	18"
Calves (350-500 lb.)	18"	18"	48"	18"
Bulls	30"	30"	36-40"	30"

Ensminger, 1992. Stockman's Handbook. Interstate Publisher, Seventh Edition

Producers should apply the measurements in Table 1 to determine their trough needs. For example, with a 27 cow herd, 7 troughs, 10 feet long and 30 inches in width would be needed to provide feed for the cows.

Following are some management suggestions for limit feeding cattle with troughs.

- Group the cattle according to size and age. By dividing into groups, each can be fed a ration that meets its requirements. It will also overcome the problem of the larger cattle dominating at the feed troughs and preventing the younger and weaker animals from obtaining their feed.
- Start by feeding hay in the troughs which would introduce the cattle to the troughs. This will be a new experience for cows in most herds.
- Once the cattle have adjusted to coming to the troughs, the grain or concentrate can be gradually introduced by spreading on top of the hay and the hay reduced down to 0.5% to 1.0% of the cattle's body weight. For a 1,000 lb. mature cow, this would be 5 to 10 lb. of hay per day depending on the volume of hay desired to be "stretched."
- Generally, the "rule of thumb" in replacing hay with corn is 1.0 lb. of corn equals 2.0 lb. of hay. Do not completely eliminate the hay. Cows will need a minimum of 5.0 lb. of hay per day. Cows being fed 5.0 lb. of hay per day would need 10.0 lb. of corn and those being fed 10 lb. should be fed 7.0 lb. of corn. Other concentrates (either farm mixed or commercial) can also work well with adjustments for nutrient content.
- To aid in ensuring that timid cows receive their feed needs, consider placing troughs apart from each other. Move troughs as needed to minimize mud problems.

Adequate trough space will be needed to "stretch" the winter feed supply and result in an efficient and economical feeding program and ensure performance. Producers should plan ahead to either construct or purchase feed troughs.