



COW SENSE CHRONICLE

NOVEMBER 2015

WINTER READINESS CHECKLIST

At the time of this writing, Bozeman is experiencing its first days of snowfall this season. Are you ready for winter? Here are some items to consider for your cow herd winter readiness.

- If you've been reading Cow Sense Chronicle for any length of time, hopefully I've convinced you that testing your hay for nutrient analysis is a critical component of a nutrition plan. It's hard to manage if you don't measure first! From your forage test results, you can build a more accurate and economical winter feeding plan. Do you need to purchase supplement? Does your high-protein second cutting need to be diluted with a lower quality hay to more optimally match cow requirements? Do you have enough hay? Does your grain hay have a cautionary level of nitrates? If so, do you have a feeding plan to avoid nitrate toxicity problems?
- Are you happy with your mineral supplementation program? Adding a mineral panel to those hay tests will help you to know more about mineral intake - and don't forget the minerals in water! Contact your local MSU Extension office for assistance with forage and water sampling and testing.
- How do the cows look this fall? Post-weaning is a great time to critically evaluate cow body condition, along with the start of the third trimester and at calving. Are there thin cows who might benefit from being sorted off and run for a time with the young cows? The post-weaning time period during the cow's second trimester is when her nutrient requirements are lowest. Putting weight on thin cows is least expensive and most efficient at this time. Speaking of body condition, you might take a look at your herd bulls.
- Fall is a great time for parasite control. Contact your veterinarian if you have questions about what products to use or changing up your protocols to reduce resistance. Did you use fly tags this summer? Remove them at the same time as you pregnancy check and/or administer parasite control products.

- How are your herd bulls faring after the breeding season? Mature bulls might be able to get by on an all-forage diet, but young bulls should be around 75% of their mature body weight by the time they are 2. It's recommended that bulls be in body condition score 6 at turnout, as they will lose 100-300 pounds while doing their job. Do you have a plan to ensure bulls will be ready when you need them next year? While it is important for thin bulls to achieve optimal body condition, it is also important not to overfeed bulls. Fat layers around the scrotum can interfere with temperature regulation, negatively impacting semen quality and production. Overfeeding can also lead to foot problems and soundness issues, and out-of-shape bulls are less likely to hustle to breed cows when turnout time rolls around. I recommend that bulls receive a year-round mineral supplementation program just like the cows. Trace minerals like copper, zinc, manganese, and selenium, along with vitamins A and E are important antioxidants that can prevent sperm damage from stress.
- Winter pasture with appropriate shelter and/or bedding is critical for protecting important bull body parts! Frostbite can hinder a bull's ability to raise and lower the testicles for proper temperature regulation. While mild frostbite has a good recovery rate, severe frostbite can leave a bull infertile. Ensure that bulls have the ability to get out the wind and are not lying on unbedded, frozen ground. Giving bulls plenty of room to exercise and to allow for the pecking order to sort out are other steps to ensure bulls make it through winter and are ready to breed cows for you next spring.
- Evaluate your culling and replacement policies. Are you keeping cows that aren't paying for themselves? Hopefully pregnancy status goes without saying, but open cows should head down the road. Soundness, age/teeth, udder structure, and calf quality are all important to consider as well. If you raise your own replacement heifers, consider their development program. Are you satisfied with the approach you've been taking, or would you like different results from your heifer development program?

Have a great November - next month's issue will complete three years of Cow Sense Chronicle.
Thanks for reading!