

South Dakota Rancher[®]

Management tips for South Dakota livestock and grassland managers

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Estimating Cow-Herd Winter Forage Needs

If a captive supply of winter feed is short in your ranch business this year, now is the time to start looking. Whether it is grass hay, alfalfa, cereal grains, straw, or corn hay, ranchers that wait too long to start looking for a supply of winter feed could get caught between a limited supply or faced with substantial transportation costs, or both.

The expected upward pressure on hay/forage prices that would normally be expected in the situation we are in now has not really materialized so far, largely due to excessive trucking costs. However, as supplies continue to dwindle as we head into fall and early winter, you can expect forage prices to increase and trucking charges may also increase as seasonal diesel fuel mixes reach the pumps.



Out of all of this, two primary questions have repeatedly surfaced that I would like to address in this issue: 1) How can I project how much hay I will need to feed my cow herd this winter? and 2) How much will a ton of purchased forage cost me after freight charges?

To easily answer these two questions using a wide variety of parameters to fit individual ranches, I have developed a couple of spreadsheets that can help you with the calculations. The first spreadsheet can give you a good idea of the amount of bulk forage you will need to feed a specific number of cows for a specific period of time and the other will help you calculate forage cost/ton after freight charges. You can access these spreadsheets at:

<http://ars.sdstate.edu/faculty/Mousel.htm> and click on "Winter Feed Cost Calculator"

When using the winter feed calculator, you will be allowed to change cow body weight, number of days on feed, number of cows in the herd, and the price/ton of feed. This will give you a ballpark amount of feed needed and approximately what it will cost, excluding freight.

In the Freight Calculator, you will have the option of changing the freight charge, number of miles, and the cost of the forage. This spreadsheet will then give you the cost/ton of the forage and the freight.

If you have any questions about how to use either spreadsheet, give me a call and we can go through it step-by-step.

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