

SUPPLEMENTING PROTEIN WHEN WINTER GRAZING

Every day you can graze corn stalks or winter pasture saves you fifty cents to a dollar compared to feeding hay or silage. Protein supplements are critical to your success, though.

Winter grazing saves lots of money and usually takes less labor than feeding cows all winter. But these advantages become meaningless if cows don't stay healthy or loose condition due to a lack of protein.

Why is protein so important? In ruminants, like cattle, protein is used twice – first by the microbes in the rumen that are digesting the fiber in the corn stalks and winter grass and secondly by the animal.

For the microbes to digest these low quality forages, the diet must contain at least seven to eight percent protein. Otherwise the microbes become protein deficient and are unable to work effectively. When this happens, the amount of energy the animal receives from the forage is low and the animal becomes energy deficient. So one major reason to supplement protein with winter forages is to make sure the microbes are fed properly so your animal does not become energy deficient. In other words, protein increases energy.

The protein supplement you use is important. Many cheap protein sources contain mostly urea and other forms of non-protein nitrogen. These supplements are less effective at this time of year when cattle are eating mostly winter forages that contain low energy.

Instead, use supplements that contain more all-natural protein. Alfalfa often is the cheapest natural source of protein, but other sources also work well.

Winter grazing can reduce winter feed costs and labor. Feed the right protein with it, and you will be successful.

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