



N.C. Cooperative Extension  
Davie County Center  
180 South Main St., Ste. 210  
Mocksville, NC 27028  
P: 336.753.6100  
davie.ces.ncsu.edu

N.C. Cooperative Extension  
Yadkin County Center  
2051 Agricultural Way, Ste. 201  
Yadkinville, NC 27055  
P: 336.849.7908  
yadkin.ces.ncsu.edu

RUCKER'S RAMBLINGS  
ANIMAL AGRICULTURE INFORMATION  
DECEMBER 2021

Phillip Rucker, Jr.  
Extension Agent  
Agriculture-Livestock

### **MAKE SURE YOUR LIVESTOCK DRINK WATER**

Winter is here, we have experienced some bitter cold temperatures, and there is a good chance of more cold days ahead. Common sense tells us that when the temperature dips, the water sources for our livestock also experience a temperature drop. Dr. Gail Waldman at Rivendale Large Animal Hospital reminded me of the IMPORTANCE of animals consuming enough water to keep their digestive systems moving and maintain overall health. When water temperature is real low, livestock reduce consumption. Since we are feeding more hay and other fibrous bulky feed to help keep our livestock warm, adequate water consumption is PARAMOUNT to reduce the chance of this bulky feed blocking the digestive system. Horses are prone to colic this time of year if they do not consume adequate amounts of water. Be sure to monitor your livestock as much as possible to help ensure they are drinking water. Providing warm water is a great option but if that option is not available, adding a little salt to their feed and making sure they have access to salt and minerals will help increase water consumption. Adequate water consumption is such a simple way to reduce the possibility of digestive issues. Contact me, Dr. Waldman or your local veterinarian for more information.

### **CALCULATE YOUR FEED RESOURCES**

I have discussed before the importance of calculating your feed supplies. There is no time like the present to do this management practice. Evaluate feed resources (grazing, hay, silage, etc.) for sufficient amounts and quality. Know the number and size of animals to feed and performance expectations to help you determine your forage needs. We are getting ready to move into the official winter season and having ample feed resources is so vitally important. Remember your livestock can't run down to the feed store, the local hay supplier or other places to purchase something to eat. They are dependent on you. They need adequate nutrition to perform at a high level and meet your production needs. Now is the time to check and make up for any deficiencies before it's too late. Remember: Your livestock are depending on you for their next meal. Don't let them down.

### **HAY DIRECTORY**

We have already had a couple of nights in the low 20's in some areas. I know there are quite a few producers feeding hay. I have started a list with folks with hay for sale (round and some square) and so far very few requests from producers looking for hay. I'm sure as the weather gets colder and grass gets shorter, the demand for hay will increase. Contact me and I'll try to get you in touch with hay sources to help meet your needs.

**THE EXTENSION CENTER** will be closed December 23, 24 & 27 of 2021 for Christmas as well as December 31, 2021 for New Years. We trust you will take some time to spend with your families.



## **UPCOMING PROGRAMS**

Here are a few programs that might interest you. Some are from other agents and some are programs I am working on with other counties. I have advertised some of these before, but you can still sign up for the remaining sessions.

Are you interested in raising meat rabbits for production? If so, join NC Cooperative Extension for an Introduction to Meat Rabbit Production for producers. This will be a three-part series. You can attend one or all of the sessions.

- January 13 - Designing a Business Plan, Housing, Breed Selection
- January 20 - Nutrition/Health, Predator Control, Processing
- January 27 - Producer Panel

All workshops will be held online through Zoom from 6:30-8:00 p.m. EST.

Register: <https://go.ncsu.edu/meatrabbit>

## **FORAGE AND GRASSLANDS COUNCIL ANNUAL WORKSHOPS**

I sent this out earlier and the first program has already been held. You can still participate in the other programs. The NC Forage and Grassland Council has provided Winter Meetings for a long time and they are keeping up their tradition. The Council is offering 4 virtual workshops and some Regional Field Days. The programs are free but you MUST REGISTER to participate. The attached flier has program topics and dates.

Please click on the link to register for these programs.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdf6AJuhgCQVK0Z5VCzx5F-276ka7oVnclY-PJq-9UMG92iCg/viewform>

## **STATESVILLE AREA BEEF CONFERENCE**

The Statesville Area Beef Conference is planned for Thursday, January 27, 2022. This year's conference will once again be held at the Iredell Agricultural Center 444 Bristol Rd., Statesville. The program will consist of many topics designed to help you be more efficient and cut some of the input costs for your operation. The program will begin at 3:30 PM and conclude with a sponsored meal. The program is free but registration is recommended so adequate preparations can be made. To register, please contact the Extension Center at Davie 336-753-6100 or Yadkin 336-849-7908 before January 24, 2022. Or register at [www.go.ncsu.edu/areabeef](http://www.go.ncsu.edu/areabeef). More details will be sent in January. Please put this program on your calendar.

## **CATTLEMEN'S CONFERENCE FEB 25 & 26, 2022 IN HICKORY**

Plans are being finalized for the 2022 NC Cattlemen's Conference. It will be held Friday and Saturday, February 25 & 26, 2022. Once again it will be held at the Hickory Convention Center. They are planning for a full blown, in person conference this year. Plans are coming together for some great educational sessions. Some of the topics are How to optimize resources to keep inputs as low as possible while optimizing the outputs of our farms; Producing and Marketing Freezer Beef and much more. The trade show is a great place to meet industry representatives and learn about new products. Just getting together with your cattle friends is a great way to network and share ideas. The NC Cattlemen's will send information to members. If you are not a member, no time like the present to join. To see more details for the conference go to [www.nccattle.com](http://www.nccattle.com).

## **TIPS FOR WINTER HERD MANAGEMENT**

Condensed from Twig Marston's article for "Progressive Cattle" Published on November 11, 2020

Most of this article is aimed at cattle producers but other livestock producers can glean useful information to use on your operation to improve animal comfort, productivity and efficiency. Even though there are differences between species, there are numerous similarities in management protocols.

Winter nutrition and management has many focal points, but there are a few management decisions all cattle producers should place on their to-do lists. Most spring-calving herds look at winter as a time to prepare cow herds for calving, early milk production and the breeding season. Fall-calving cows are in full lactation and breeding in addition to maintaining bodyweight under times of environmental stress. In both production scenarios, the gap between fall and green grass is a time to implement management and nutritional plans that will reduce costs, increase efficiency and create more profits.

Here are some steps you should consider:

- 1. Monitor body condition.** Body condition scores are an open book to the nutritional plane cattle have been on. It is simple to learn and can be done daily. Thin livestock are less productive and have a harder time making it through the harsher weather. Fat livestock can survive harsher climates but the extra condition reduces productivity and efficiency. All animals do not need to be in the same body condition to be productive. But in general, moderate body condition is an excellent indication that they are matching their environments and management plans.
- 2. Don't guess, forage test.** Forage testing has great value and can be a top investment for producers. Knowing a few basic facts about feedstuffs makes money in several different ways. Nutritional profiles can be used to determine the value of feed and assist in making diets that are both least cost and best performing. With the wide variety and availability of feedstuffs today, knowing the nutritional makeup can predict the difference between a good deal and a bomb. Don't make the mistake of utilizing feedstuffs that do not meet daily requirements.
- 3. Pregnancy check the herd.** Identifying open cows increases the option to capitalize on their management and financial rewards. Open females can be culled from the herd, creating a reduction in feed costs, or grouped and managed to increase their salvage value as late-bred females or placed into a different calving group. With pregnancy information, management options can be evaluated and implemented that can be used to create profit.
- 4. Minimize feed waste.** Numerous trials have shown the value of feeding equipment that reduces waste and yet does not limit convenience. Losses over 20% can be the result of poor forage management and feed handling. The amount of feed delivered also needs to be considered. I once had an astute cattleman tell me, "Feed cows a day's worth of hay, and they are eating in the dining room; feed them two days' worth of hay, and they are eating in the living room, but feed them three days' worth of hay, and they will be eating in the bathroom."
- 5. Cold stress is costly; try to provide weather protection, when possible.** For each degree below an animal's comfort temperature, total digestible nutrient (TDN) energy requirements increase 1%. Wind, moisture and lack of sunshine only make it worse. When temperatures are near freezing, the wind is blowing at 10 to 15 miles per hour and rain has soaked them to the bone, energy requirements will be increased by over 30%. To meet those additional requirements: they must consume more pounds of feed and/or consume a diet with greater energy density.
- 6. Control both internal and external parasites.** Parasites are freeloaders that cost you money. Lice are a major external parasite that should be controlled at the beginning of and throughout the winter months. Scratching and hair loss are sure signs of lice infestation. Internal parasites decrease digestion and gut health. Application methods and a variety of products give producers choices that are effective. Lost income to parasite infestation has been estimated annually in the millions of dollars. Timely applications of parasite controls should be a priority item in every management plan.

Livestock operations will have individual identities and needs, but there are common management decisions that can increase profits and efficiency. Basic records can be used to refine management decisions. Eliminating problems eliminates profit robbers. Properly adjusting to environmental conditions improves herd performance and prioritizes resources to improve efficiency.

## **DON'T FORGET THE FERTILIZER**

We all have watched fertilizer prices increase (because of factors beyond our control). The question was asked more than once: Can I afford to fertilize my pastures and hayfields? Remember what we have discussed many times before; we are all grass farmers first and market the grass through livestock or hay. When fertilizer prices go up, we still need to provide nutrients to our forages so we can still produce a good crop.

Look at it this way, if your car is low on gas or your tractor is low on diesel, you will fill them up because they will not run without FUEL. Grass is the lifeblood, the fuel of your livestock operation. Without grass, the operation would have a very difficult time surviving. What is the fuel for grass, fertilizer. Grass MUST have nutrients and energy to grow and produce forage for your operation. So, without fertilizer, many grass stands will become weak and allow weeds to overtake them and you will have less forage to graze/hay and spend more money restoring the stand.

When we experience higher inputs, we have to look for options to make our operations more cost effective. When fertilizer prices increase, don't refuse to apply fertilizer, utilize options to increase efficiency.

- # Maintain the proper pH level and the grass will use nutrients more efficiently Apply lime if needed.
- # Study and research different fertilizers and their efficiency for your operation.
- # Reduce livestock numbers to reduce overgrazing. Damaged grass stands cost more to repair and restore. It takes quite a bit of time to overcome severe damage.
- # Fertilize when it looks like there will be adequate moisture so forage gets the benefit. Fertilize at the correct time for your specific crop to utilize it more efficiently.
- # Crops remove nutrients and if you don't replace them, the nutrient levels get lower and it costs more to bring them back to the correct level. Just putting some nutrients back will help.
- # Soil test!!!! I can't preach this sermon enough. Difficult to manage nutrients if you don't know what is needed.
- # Phosphorus and potassium benefit the roots. Weak roots lead to a weak plant. Try to maintain adequate levels.

Many found it hard to justify a fall application because it was so dry. We have had some moisture and should have more over the winter. Be thinking about a fertilizer plan that will take advantage of the available moisture and benefit your grass. A late winter/early spring application will give your forage a good start to provide your livestock ample grazing and strong competition against those ever pesky weeds.

Contact me if you have fertilizer questions and we will walk through them together.

## **FUND-A-FARMER GRANT**

Grants seem to be popular now and another one to apply for is the [Fund-a-Farmer Grant](https://foodanimalconcernstrust.org/grants/) from Food Animal Concerns Trust. If you are thinking about applying, don't wait until the last minute in case you have questions or encounter technical difficulties. Applications must be submitted online by 11:59pm CT on **January 20, 2022** to be considered for this round of grantmaking. Farmers may apply for a maximum of \$3,000 (up from \$2,500 last year). They hope to award at least \$150,000 worth of grants (up from \$130,000 last year). This is a competitive process - and they typically receive more applications than they can fund. This is a nationwide grant so competition is strong. For information or to apply, click on <https://foodanimalconcernstrust.org/grants/>. This grant has some specific qualifications so be sure and read all information thoroughly before deciding if you qualify. If you do have questions, use the above website to talk with the group overseeing the grant to get the most up to date and accurate information.