



Virtual Beef

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Stretching Forage Supplies

Thomas Ferguson, Forage and Grazier Specialist, OMAFRA, Lindsay

This year has seen dry weather across most of southern Ontario with average yields of 1st cut followed by low second cut yields. Rains returned in August providing a good cut of hay at the end of August or in September. With the dry weather, most of the hay that was taken off was high quality, both in terms of nutritional value and having it harvested at the optimal moisture content. Now the challenge is to take advantage of the harvested forages to get the most out of them and stretch them through until the pastures are ready for animals in the spring.

Reducing Waste

Some of the biggest losses in the hay industry come during feedout and storage. Storing hay outside can cause large dry matter losses, while precipitation may seem like the cause of spoilage, wicking moisture out of the ground is a major cause of spoilage. After baling hay, if the bales are dry, they should be moved into storage as quickly as possible. Bales of hay need to be stored off of the ground and covered with a tarp or put into hay storage. Allowing bales of hay to remain outside, opens them up to the elements which causes both the leaching of nutrients as well as spoilage. If just 3 inches around the outside of a 5 foot bale is spoiled, then 19% of the dry matter will be lost, and the nutritional value of the remainder of the bale has decreased. Another big area of waste is in feeding systems. Feeding bales of hay on the ground or feeding only once a week, while saving labour, result in high levels of wasted hay. Feeding beef cattle a round bale on the ground causes 40% of the dry matter to be wasted while using a round bale feeder can cut that in half or more. Feeding daily and using efficient bale feeders or feeding to demand can further decrease the amount of wasted hay. The goal in feeding efficiently is to have 5% or less in feed refusals. If hay is in short supply then feeding systems should be re-evaluated to ensure that the hay is being fed as efficiently as possible.

Feeding Grain

An option when hay is in short supply is to limit the amount of hay fed to the cattle and replace the missing nutrients with grain. When comparing nutrients, 1 kg of corn can replace 2 kg of hay in up to 1/3 of the ration. If Barley is available, it has roughly 90% of the energy value of corn while wheat should be valued equal to or slightly higher than corn. Distillers Grain can also be used -as a substitute feed. Distillers Grain is pre-ground and has higher protein content than ground corn and can be an economical feed source. In most cases when feeding grain, cattle will be limit fed, they need to have enough bunk space so all of the cattle can eat at once, otherwise the dominant cows will consume more than their share, putting them at risk of acidosis, bloat and getting fat, while the passive animals will lose body condition. If more than 2 kg (4.5 lb) of grain are being fed, then it should be broken up into multiple feedings per day to prevent acidosis and grain overload. When comparing prices of hay and commodities this year, it seems to be very economical to substitute some grain for hay where inventories are short.

Using Cornstalks and Straw

The use of corn stover or straw for beef cattle can make a good feed source. With Total Digestible Nutrients(TDN) levels in the mid-40's straw can provide a significant amount of energy needs, but it will need to be supplemented with a protein source. The best candidates for feeding straw are mature dry cows in their second trimester, as they have the lowest nutritional requirements. For these animals a diet of straw and quality hay, along with salt and mineral can provide all of their nutritional needs. Straw can also be fed to other groups of animals, either at lower rates or with grain supplementation to ensure that they are getting enough nutrients. The most nutritious straw is oat straw, followed by barley, soybean and wheat. The easiest way to incorporate straw into a diet is through the use of a TMR. This will thoroughly mix the straw and the hay with any grain that is required, however the feed needs to be managed to ensure that the animals are not sorting through the TMR to eat the high quality feed first and leaving the straw until the bunks are almost empty. If the animals are sorting it can cause acidosis, and some cows will get too much energy, while others not enough. Feeding straw and hay in separate bale feeders, tends not to work very well as the cattle will eat all of the hay first and avoid the straw. Feeding hay and straw at alternate feedings can work for producers without a TMR. When alternating feeds, the group size and the amount of feed should balance so that all of the feed is consumed before the next feeding.

Corn stover is nutritious forage for cattle. Half of the energy in a corn plant is in the cob and the other half is in the stalk. Immediately after combining, corn stover may have a TDN as high as 70, however as the season progresses and the cattle eat the more nutritious parts of the plants and nutrients leach out of the stalks, the TDN will drop into the 40's. Corn stover can provide feed well into the fall and winter. When the animals are first put into a field of corn, the field needs to be inspected for grain and if there is a large amount of grain, both spilled and cobs that were not combined, then the animals access to the field may need to be limited. Limited access can be done through strip grazing with an electric fence, or only allowing them in for a certain period each day. While grazing corn stover fecal scores and body condition scores should be monitored to determine when the stover needs additional supplementation. Generally when the husks and leaves have been stripped off of the plants the animals will require additional feed. 1 acre of corn stover can generally provide feed for 1-2 beef cows for 1 month.

Winter Rye or Triticale

Another option for reducing forage requirements is to put the animals out on pasture sooner in the spring. While traditional grasses will not start to grow any earlier, winter rye or triticale can be planted for early season pasture. Winter rye and winter triticale can be planted following corn silage or soybeans through the end of October. Winter rye is a cereal grain crop with early spring growth. It is more winter hardy than winter wheat and produces top growth. Winter triticale is a cross between wheat and rye. In southern Ontario winter rye will be ready to graze around mid-April if it was planted on dry ground. This can provide an opportunity to get the animals out on pasture early in the season and possibly give the permanent pastures some extra rest. Winter rye can also be cut for hay at the boot stage to maximize forage quality and quantity. After cereal rye heads out the nutritional value of the rye drops very quickly. It is typically in boot stage mid-May, which gives the opportunity to double-crop corn, soybean or annual forage. Winter rye should not be confused with Ryegrass. Winter rye is a cereal crop while ryegrass is a forage grass with 3 main species: Perennial ryegrass, Italian ryegrass, and Westerwold (Annual) ryegrass.

The OMAFRA website has additional information on feeding.

Coping with Hay Shortages in Beef Wintering Cow Rations

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/beef/facts/07-053.htm>

The Use of Straw and Grain to Stretch Feed Supplies For Wintering Beef Cows

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/beef/facts/straw.htm>

Beef: Turn Corn Stover to Low Cost Pasture

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/livestock/beef/facts/cornstover.htm>

Double Cropping Fall Rye for Extra Forage

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/facts/fallrye.htm>

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Bull Selection in Ontario

Barry Potter, Agriculture Development Advisor, OMAFRA, New Liskeard

What kind of bull do you want? There are as many colours, shapes, and sizes of bulls as you can think of on the market today. Perhaps the market is the best place to start. What kind of calf do you want to sell? And what kind of cow do you want to keep to obtain that calf?

Bull selection in Ontario used to be much simpler. Provincial bull evaluation centres allowed commercial producers to compare many different breeding programs at one location. All bulls received the same diet, and were evaluated for growth, muscle and fat deposition. A producer run organization, Beef Improvement Ontario (BIO), compiled all the

collected data, and used genetic equations to create economic selection indices for two streams of commercial farms. But that was the 1980's and 90's. What can a producer do today to find a bull that works with his/her cow herd?

Defining the type of bull desired remains the prerogative of the purchaser, and his or her needs. But there are three defining criteria for any bull. Can he breed cows, or in other words is he sound reproductively? Can he walk and mount cows? Does he have the genetic makeup to fit the farmer's needs?

Most farmers spend a lot of time discussing the last point. Breed associations advertise the merits of their breeds. If you want to start an animated discussion, at your next coffee shop hangout, just toss off a comment on which breed you think is the best, and watch the fireworks commence.

Which breed is best? The old adage, "there is more difference within breeds than between breeds" may be true, but each breed does have its true type and list of predominant traits. The Meat Animal Research Centre in the United States provides a list of rankings of breeds for traits. Using general guidelines, producers can narrow down their breed preference based on what they are marketing and what their needs are.

In order to help farmers with selection, Beef Improvement Ontario (BIO) would produce a smaller frame / maternal bull selection index and a faster growing carcass based index. Today, seedstock producers could use an index that BIO could tailor for their own selection pressure. They could put in selection parameters such as calving ease, growth rate, carcass traits, and build an index.

Another selection tool becoming more popular is genomics. By pulling root hair bulbs from the animal, usually from the tail, and sending them to a laboratory, a farmer can learn quickly about the DNA of an animal and the traits they are carrying. Some breeds have more knowledge of the genetic markers in a genome test. For example, one could find out feed efficiency, carcass traits, and docility in one test. These traits may be hard to measure on farm. As science expands its knowledge of genetic markers, the available information becomes that much more powerful. Seedstock producers are using this information to select the breeding stock they offer for sale to commercial farms.

Cross breeding remains a simple yet valuable tool for beef farmers. By crossing breeds, one can take advantage of hybrid vigour to have more vigorous calves, and more efficient cows.

Having a veterinarian perform a reproductive soundness evaluation on your bull prior to breeding can help stave off any potential problems of a bull not being physically able to breed your cows. Semen testing your bulls each year prior to breeding season can make sure the bull is still good for the coming year.

The old adage, a bull is half your herd, demonstrates the impact of taking time to select the right bull. The bull evaluation centres of the past have mostly been replaced by farms feeding their own bulls and collecting data themselves. There are many private and group bull sales across the province. Take the time to visit seedstock farms, review bull sale offerings and select the sire that will benefit your operation the best.

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Gastrointestinal Nematodes in Ontario Cow-Calf Herds

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Gastrointestinal nematodes and anthelmintic use:

Gastrointestinal nematodes (GIN), also known as roundworms, are fairly common in beef cattle. They have a direct life-cycle, including one host, and primarily spread through oral transmission on pasture. We generally find a diverse

collection of GIN genus and species in one host animal. Some of the most common GIN found in cattle are *Ostertagia spp.*, *Cooperia spp.*, and *Nematodirus spp.* The make-up and number of GIN varies between animals, herds and geographical regions.

Depending on the species and the resilience of the host, GIN infections can suppress immune response and change gastrointestinal motility, digestion and absorption(1). Today because of the widespread knowledge and use of anthelmintics (aka dewormers), clinical signs of GIN parasitism like weight loss and diarrhea are uncommon in cattle. Our bigger concern is subclinical infections (i.e., those that you can't necessarily see) and the effect that these have on animal performance.

There are well documented advantages to including a deworming program in your beef operation. Two of the commonly used anthelmintics in the cattle industry are ivermectin (e.g., Ivomec®, Noromectin®) and fenbendazole (e.g., Safeguard®). Studies have shown weaning weight advantages of 7-22 kg (15.4-48.4 lbs) ($P < 0.05$) (2,3), increased average daily gains (3,4), as well as improved milk production and reproduction (5–7). In addition to these production increases, an economic benefit has also been seen with the use of anthelmintics in cow-calf operations (8,9). It is hard to accurately measure economic benefits because of all the variables associated with cattle, weather, geography, management, and infection levels as well as the forever changing markets.

Are your dewormers doing their job?

Anthelmintic resistance is currently a significant concern to small-ruminant producers, particularly sheep farms, with several cases of resistance found in Ontario sheep flocks (10). However, there is lack of agreement that anthelmintic resistance is occurring in cattle. Reports of anthelmintic resistance in cattle vary with drug class, GIN species, and geographical region. At this time, there has been no literature published that looks at anthelmintic resistance to fenbendazole or ivermectin in cattle in Ontario, Canada.

Fecal egg count reduction tests (FECRT) can be used to get an idea of how dewormers are working, by measuring the portion of GIN eggs or adults that are able to survive treatment. To perform a FECRT, fecal egg counts (FEC) are conducted before treatment with an anthelmintic and 14-days afterwards.

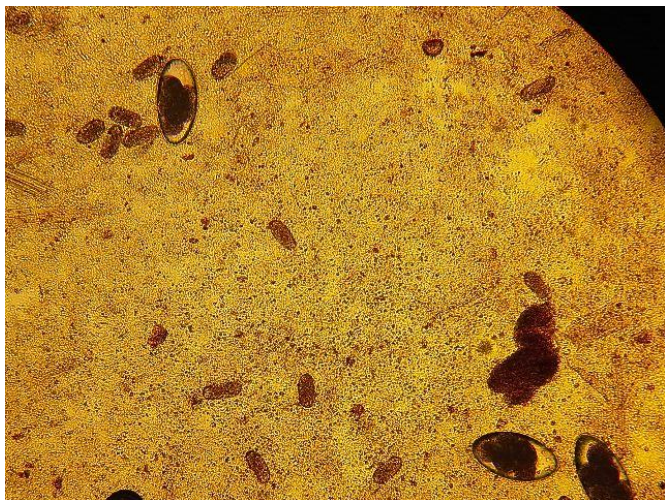


Figure 1: GIN eggs extracted from a beef cow fecal sample for a fecal egg count

Producers should consult their herd veterinarian about submitting fecal samples for fecal egg counts. Samples should be collected from a minimum of ten different animals and can be mixed together. The samples should be collected from fresh fecal pats and placed in a clean bag. They need to be kept cool and submitted to the laboratory within 48 hours of collection. A pooled sample the size of a golf ball is all that is required to conduct the count.

Research update:

In 2014 and 2015 we conducted a randomized clinical trial at the University of Guelph Elora Beef Research Centre looking at GIN infections. The study objectives were to: 1) examine the epidemiology of GIN in an Ontario cow-calf herd,

to determine the most appropriate time to apply anthelmintics, and 2) determine any difference in efficacy of two common anthelmintics used in cattle production; ivermectin and fenbendazole.

In the spring of both years, a total of 128 cows and calves were randomly assigned to one of three groups – one was given a pour-on ivermectin product, one orally administered a fenbendazole product, and the third group did not receive an anthelmintic. Cows and calves were treated in the spring and randomly assigned a rotationally grazed pasture for the summer. One treatment per field was used to decrease the risk of cross-contamination.



Figure 2: Trial animals on rotationally grazed pasture at the Elora Beef Research Centre

Weights, fecal samples, and cow body condition scores (cows) were collected before turnout on pasture and at 28-day intervals throughout the grazing season. Fecal egg counts were conducted using the Modified Wisconsin Sugar Floatation Technique.

Over the two years no clinical cases of GIN parasitism were seen – all counts were at subclinical levels. On average, calf FEC was higher than cow FEC. About 25% of the fecal samples collected from the calves throughout the summer had zero or undetectable levels of GIN eggs. This highlights the pattern of over-dispersion typical of GIN in a grazing herd. It is typically felt that about 80% of the parasites are carried by only 20% of the animals. There was a peak in FEC seen in cows and calves after about two months on grass ($P > 0.05$). This finding would suggest a possible benefit to treating later in the pasture season around late June and early July rather than at turnout. Though this could be beneficial in suppressing infection, treating later in the pasture season does present a challenge to cattle producers in terms of labour and infrastructure complications.

Cattle treated with an anthelmintic in the spring before turnout had significantly lower FEC than those that were not treated. In the calves there was no difference in FEC between fenbendazole or ivermectin treatment groups ($P = 0.42$). Cows treated with the fenbendazole product had significantly higher FEC than the ivermectin group ($P = 0.028$), however the FEC for the cows were all very low. In this study treating with an anthelmintic had no effect on cow or calf performance. Treatment did not have a significant effect on the unadjusted weaning weight of the calves in this trial ($P = 0.35$). In addition, treatment had no effect on pregnancy rates of the cows ($P = 0.18$).

In addition, we performed a FECRT to look for evidence of anthelmintic resistance in the second year of the trial. We used four different versions of the FECRT different methods for performing a FECRT. All the methods showed evidence of resistance or suspected resistance, to both drug classes, since the lower confidence intervals were all $<90\%$, following guidelines by Coles, et al (11). Since there is no standard FECRT for calculating anthelmintic efficacy, caution needs to be taken when interpreting anthelmintic efficacy statements. No animals in this trial had clinical signs of GIN parasitism (e.g. diarrhea, weight loss, bottle jaw). We only saw subclinical infections and in addition there was no significant advantage to treating animals in terms of performance. Given these findings, it is questionable if there is biological or economic advantage to treating cows-calf pairs under similar conditions with similar parasite infection levels.

Future research:

Fecal egg counts are a useful tool for producers and veterinarians however little work has been done in cattle to differentiate what constitutes a low, medium, or high level of GIN infection in different areas in Ontario. More work is needed to distinguish this threshold level of when treatment is necessary. In addition, more work looking at timing of treatment and anthelmintic efficacy could be beneficial to producers.

Both fenbendazole and ivermectin resistance in cattle nematodes has potential to be a future challenge in the Canadian cattle industry. There is a responsibility of those involved in the industry to use current anthelmintics appropriately. This further supports the importance of developing, implementing, and monitoring GIN control programs in your beef operation.

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Harvesting Damaged or Stressed Grain Corn

Agricorp – Production Insurance

The information in this document applies to Production Insurance customers who are considering harvesting their grain corn as silage or green chop.

How your coverage works

Production Insurance includes options for grain corn affected by dry weather during the growing season.

If you choose to leave your crop in the field and harvest at the end of the growing season, you can receive a claim payment if the yield falls below your guaranteed production.

If you choose to harvest early as silage or green chop instead of waiting out the growing season, Agricorp may apply an adjustment factor. The factor is applied to the yield calculation to discount yield by a percentage based on your individual situation. Yield adjustments account for underdeveloped cobs and would increase the potential for a claim.

Any acres you leave in the field to harvest at the end of the growing season will still be covered under Production Insurance.

See the reverse for an example of how Agricorp applies a yield to grain corn harvested as silage or green chop.

Crops insured under the corn plan may be harvested as:

- dry-shelled grain corn
- high-moisture whole-shelled
- high-moisture ground-shelled
- silage
- cob corn
- high-moisture ground cob

Before you harvest

If you intend to harvest as silage or green chop, contact Agricorp so we can send out an insurance adjuster. The adjuster will contact you within 48 hours to arrange an inspection of the damage for claim purposes and to explain how your coverage works.

The sooner we inspect the crop and explain the options, the better. This allows time for you to assess the situation and make any necessary arrangements for your crop.

EXAMPLE

Applying a yield to grain corn harvested as silage or green chop

Example scenario:

- You harvest 25 of your 75 acres of corn as silage to use as livestock feed
- Your silage yield on the 25 acres is 5 tons/acre
- Your grain yield on the remaining 50 acres is 100 bushels/acre
- After inspection, an adjuster reduces your silage yield by 20%, creating an 80% adjustment factor to be used to determine your final yield.

Adjustment factors are set on a case-by-case basis to reflect individual situations and can be as low as 80%.

In this example, Agricorp's practice for applying a yield to grain corn harvested as silage would be applied as follows:

Step 1: Determine silage yield

Convert silage to grain corn using the industry standard conversion (seven bushels for each ton)

$$5 \text{ ton/ac} \times 7 \text{ bu/ton} = 35 \text{ bu/ac}$$

Apply adjustment factor for little to no cob development, if applicable

$$35 \text{ bu/ac} \times 80\% = 28 \text{ bu/ac}$$

Multiply silage yield by number of acres harvested as silage

$$25 \text{ ac} \times 28 \text{ bu/ac} = 700 \text{ bu}$$

Step 2: Determine grain yield

Multiply grain yield by number of acres harvested as grain corn

$$50 \text{ ac} \times 100 \text{ bu/ac} = 5,000 \text{ bu}$$

Step 3: Determine final yield

Add silage yield to grain yield

$$700 \text{ bu} + 5,000 \text{ bu} = 5,700 \text{ bu}$$

In this example, Agricorp would use the final yield of 5,700 bu to determine any potential Production Insurance claim, as well as next year's average farm yield.

For more information about the Production Insurance plan for corn, contact Agricorp or visit agricorp.com.

Errors and omissions excepted.

Agricorp reserves the right to make corrections if there are any errors or omissions on this feature sheet. For specific legal obligations of Production Insurance, consult the Contract of insurance, Terms and conditions. For details on the collection of information and treatment of records, refer to Part I, Section I of the contract.

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Agricorp helps producers cope with stressed crops

Weather has varied across the province this season, and while some crops are doing well, others are stressed, mostly because of the lack of rain.

On behalf of government, Agricorp delivers a comprehensive suite of business risk management programs, such as Production Insurance, which are designed to help in situations like this. Farmers who have Production Insurance coverage receive a payment if their production is less than the guaranteed level they chose.

Agricorp can help producers facing challenging crop conditions by working with them on a case-by-case basis, answering questions about program coverage and helping them through the claim process.

Severely stressed or damaged crops

Agricorp understands that some producers may be dealing with severely affected crops that are at risk of not reaching maturity. These producers may be considering harvesting the crop early for silage or green chop. Production Insurance includes options to properly determine the yield of these crops.

For details about harvesting damaged or stressed grain corn, visit the [Publications page](#) for the Production Insurance plan for corn.

While harvesting decisions are entirely up to the producer, customers need to contact Agricorp if they're considering harvesting crops early, so an adjuster can visit them and help them through the process. An adjuster can be in touch within 48 hours to make arrangements to inspect the damage and explain how coverage works for each scenario.

The sooner an adjuster inspects the crop and explains the options, the better. This allows time to assess the situation and make any necessary arrangements for the crop. Working with an adjuster as soon as possible also ensures more accurate and timely claim payments.

Other program options

The provincial and federal governments offer a comprehensive suite of business risk management programs that can help affected farmers.

[AgriStability](#) can help by protecting the whole farm income instead of one commodity at a time. Farmers receive a payment if their net farm income falls below 70 per cent of their recent average.

[AgriInvest](#) covers small declines in the farm income through a matching government contribution.

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