Nutrition Management From Start to Finish

Rod Schemm
Hitch Feedlot, Inc.
P.O. Box 1559
Guymon, OK 73942

Areas of nutritional management will be discussed in three primary segments: the essentials, starting cattle, and the finishing period.

Essentials

The first essential is a good feed caller with desire to learn, a strong work ethics, and good cattle sense. Feed callers should not be asked to do other jobs on a feedyard. Their entire effort should be in direct contact with the cattle so that they become mentally one with the cattle. A feed caller should not be asked to look after more than 25,000 head of cattle. It will take a dedicated person two years of 11 to 13 hour days to become a seasoned feed caller capable of looking after this number of cattle.

The feeding equipment must be adequate to get the job done. That does not mean just enough to get by, but all the feeding equipment necessary to properly take care of the cattle. This includes having feed trucks, loaders, haying equipment, and bunk cleaner serviced, in good working order, and ready to roll not only in good weather but ready to get the job done in tough feeding conditions.

Quality feed ingredients are essential in all feeding programs, but are especially important in the starting program. There is nothing wrong with paying top dollar for hay and other ingredients. You will probably make some of your biggest mistakes least costing your receiving rations or other special purpose rations such as hospital rations.

Another prerequisite to a good feeding program is good communication between departments on the yard. The most critical area is between the feeding and cattle handling departments. It is the where, when, how, and how much about the cattle. Feed departments need to know as much background about the cattle as possible. This might include where the cattle are coming from, previous feeding history, and shrink on arrival. The cattle department needs to be advised about changes in the cattle consumption or changes in rations. Sometimes it important for a feed caller and cattle foreman to look at cattle together.

Starting Cattle On Feed

The technique used for starting cattle on feed will depend greatly on the background of the cattle. Always have receiving pens ready for new cattle. This includes being clean, having clean waterers and fresh, clean hay in the bunks. Receiving pens should provide about 150 square feet of dust free pen space for cattle. New cattle, especially newly weaned cattle, will walk the pens and stir up quite a lot of dust. Generally cattle should be weighed, counted and put in a receiving pen as quickly as possible. Cattle should be handled quietly and slowly. Easy handling is very important. It will improve the cattle's approach to the bunk and make the easier to read their early consumption.

The receiving feed should be designed especially for that purpose. The feed must be palatable, high quality and bunk stable. There is no place for trying to cut costs in a receiving ration.

If cattle have been in transit more than three hours they should be rested at least 12 hours before they are processed. In hot whether cattle should always be processed early in the morning. It is important to be ready to process cattle seven days a week so that processing is not delayed, and the cattle can be moved to their home pen and get started on milled ration.

When the cattle are taken to their home pen it is important the pen be ready for the cattle. This includes being scraped and cleaned, the water tank scrubbed, and fresh feed in the bunk waiting for the cattle. Handle the cattle slowly and efficiently while moving them to the home pen. It is important to get another head count as the cattle enter the pen to make sure the inventory is correct and the proper number is entered into the feed callers log. This is also a good time to observe cattle closely for any irregularities such as injuries that might have occurred or sickness. If cattle don't go directly to the bunk when they go into the pen they need to be pushed up to the bunk to make sure they find their feed.

After you get cattle settled into the pen they need to be left alone. Any activity in the pen will just keep the cattle stirred up and increase the number of problems

you will have with the cattle during the receiving period.

Hay is a good feed to be included in the ration for staring cattle because it is a familiar feed and will help bring cattle to the bunk. Hay should always be fed in the bunk. Cattle should be hayed a minimum of twice a day at the rate of two to five pounds per head and top dressed with a milled ration that is specially designed for new cattle. Cattle should find some long stem hay in the bunk for at least five days. Calves or stale cattle may be hayed four times a day for up to twelve days. The presentation of the ration to the cattle at this time is extremely important. Hay processors present the hay to the cattle much better than hand delivery of hay. This is important to get good start up consumption. Feed presentation is a critical area not only for starting cattle but for finishing cattle as well.

Dry matter consumption must be monitored very closely on all cattle but especially on newly received cattle. Newly received cattle should be looked at least five times a day during the receiving period. The early morning observations are especially important. It is easier to make good observation of the cattle and it also gives you an opportunity to plan for the required adjustments for that day.

You have to be ready to adjust feed delivery to meet the needs of the cattle. If cattle are slow starting on ration and you put out a lot of feed you have a problem. But if the cattle are ready to eat you need to be ready to move with the cattle. Hay can be used to slow cattle's consumption up that come to the bunk to hard. It will help prevent the lead cattle in the pen from over eating and evening out the consumption of the targeted milled feed for all of the cattle. If the lead cattle take on too much of the milled feed it leaves too little for the more timid cattle. Hay is also good for cattle that are used to eating too much feed such as wheat cattle in the spring. In these cattle five pounds of hay fed three to five times a day may be what is needed just to get an initial fill on the cattle.

Starting problem cattle presents a special challenge to a feedyard. Long hauled, sale barn, put together, stale cattle, and some times calves fit into this category. These cattle will usually go to bunk with the smell and site of long stemmed hay, but it must be high quality. The hay can be prairie, oat or other grass hay so long as it is high quality. These cattle almost always have to be moved to the bunk. Good cowboys can get the cattle to the bunk without getting them stirred up. When you get them to the bunk back off of them and let them settle.

An experienced feed caller will get a sense for the needs of the cattle, in essence gets to thinking like the cattle and keep the kind of feed and amount of feed in front of the cattle that they feel like eating. The feed has always got to be fresh. Sometimes it is hard to establish a consumption appropriate for the cattle's requirement. Sometimes you have to wait the cattle out, but the feed must always be clean and fresh during this time. You may have to roll the feed or trickle a little hay over the top of the milled feed to entice them to eat. But never ask cattle to eat feed that is stale. It is better to throw the feed out and than to ask them to eat feed stale feed. If cattle are really difficult you may have to put a bale out on the ground between the water trough and the bunk to entice them up to try the feed in the bunk, but it is generally not a good practice to feed hay on the ground.

Fermented feeds are seldom good for starting problem cattle. Fermented feeds are not bunk stable and therefore are hard to manage in cattle that have not established a consumption pattern. It will usually take a minimum of ten days of feeding before a reliable pattern can be established. On high stressed cattle a feed caller should be slow to pull the hay, and then do it gradually. Make sure all the cattle are eating and established a good fill before you change to the second ration.

The Finishing Period

It is important to monitor dry matter consumption at least four times a day. You have to know where your consumption is, where you are and you have to always stay close to your cattle. By looking at the cattle four times a day you can anticipate changes in the cattle's eating behavior due to weather or seasonal influences on the cattle. But you have to stay on the cattle to know what they are doing. You can not run a successful nutritional management program by looking at the cattle once or twice a day. If you are feeding fermented, high energy feeds staying close to the cattle is even more important because of the poor bunk stability. You do not want the cattle to get hungry and yet you do not want any extra feed in the bunk either.

In finishing cattle you have got to be very timely about delivery of feed. Cattle are extreme creatures of habit. You must establish a routine and stay with it. This make having good equipment, good maintenance of the feeding equipment, and good people very important. Presentation of the feed to finishing cattle is critically important. Cattle will eat at almost the same time every day and from almost the same spot at the bunk every day, so feed must be delivered on time and the feed must be evenly distributed. When the cattle come to the bunk generally the feed must be there ready for them. Never let cattle stand waiting for feed more than 15 to 20 minutes. It is good to practice a little psychology on the cattle. You can keep the cattle eating if you let the cattle clean up the bunk at least once a day. It does not hurt to let cattle stand looking for feed for 15 to 20 minutes, in fact it will help keep their interest in eating, but you

don't want the cattle to get too hungry. By letting the cattle clean up on a daily basis you can get an extra ¼ to ½ pound of dry matter intake in the cattle.

Clean fresh water is always important. Waterers should be cleaned at least twice a week and in the summer cleaning should be done every 48 hours.

Sudden Death Syndrome

This is some what of a seasonal problem mainly associated with rainy weather. Twelve to twenty four hours after a rain you can expect to have a problem. It is always worse in our part of the country in the spring. When ever you see changes in consumption patterns an increase in the incidence of sudden deaths can soon follow. On high energy rations if the cattle ever get hungry and load up on feed you are in for a lot of problems. Typically sudden deaths will account for approximately eight percent of the total deaths. In the spring sudden deaths can account for twenty five to thirty percent of the total deaths. It must be kept in mind that cattle in the spring have typically been on feed longer than at other times of the year.

After rainy weather it is very important to get the bunks cleaned of wet feed and get fresh feed in front of the cattle. There is a lot we do not know about what is happening in feed that gets soaked with water. Perhaps the moisture changes the digestion pattern of the feed. Regardless of what happens to the feed there will always be more problems with sudden deaths if cattle get into rain soaked feed. It is very important to get rain soaked feed out of the bunk and get fresh feed in front of the cattle as soon as possible after a rain. At times like this everybody who can needs to be pulled in to help get the cattle fed regardless of their job assignment.

Feed ingredients also have an important association to sudden deaths. The particle size of ground high moisture corn greatly influence the incidence of sudden deaths. It is important to maintain two dissimilar grains in the ration. Twenty five percent of a dissimilar grain will lower the incidence of sudden deaths. Soluble nitrogen will rise in ground high moisture pit corn after it has been stored for seven or eight months and that may be an associated factor. Ionophores will greatly influence the consumption pattern in finishing cattle. It is important to maintain an adequate ionophore level in the finishing ration.

Summary

The story of nutritional management is told at the scales. If the program is maintained at the highest quality through out the feeding period good gains and excellent feed efficiency will be the result.

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