



## Selecting Winter Feeding Sites to Provide Multiple Benefits

John Zinn, NRCS and Dean Thomas Fillmore SWCD

Many livestock producers use winter feeding as an opportunity to spread valuable crop nutrients on parts of their operation where they are deficient. This practice is commonly called **Outwintering**. By spreading feeding areas out over a larger area than a permanent feedlot they also reduce the expense of manure hauling, avoid feedlot issues, and improve animal health and performance. A number of producers use their feeding areas as a lower cost pasture renovation method and others feed on crop fields after the livestock have gleaned them.

Art Thicke and Ralph Lentz use Outwintering as a pasture renovation method. They place round bales of weed free hay in a grid pattern in late fall or early winter before snow accumulations. They protect the round bales by enclosing them with electric fences. Both farmers place multiple rows of bales on roughly 20 foot centers. Once the animals have eaten the bales they move the bale rings to new bales and move the fence to protect the remaining bales. Both like the fact that they don't have to start a tractor to move bales every day. "I like riding on my snowmobile and there have been some years that was the way I went out to move the bale rings when we had deep snow" says Thicke.

Lentz and Thicke agree that this is a money saver for them and that the effects of the incorporated manure, urine and waste hay lasts for many years. Thicke says that he usually waits to graze the area where the bales were fed until July. There are

a lot of annual weeds but these disappear after the first year and the area really gets lush and green with desirable plant species after that. Lentz adds that he cuts his first crop later than most because he is interested in getting seed heads in his hay to spread seed over his outwintering areas.

Some producers use bale grinders to spread feed out and although this requires starting a tractor the feed utilization and distribution is outstanding. One Carlton County producer ground bales while the author watched. The animals lined up as if they were at a bunk feeder. After they were done there was very little waste... just a very thin layer of stems on top of the snow.

Although many producers have obtained good results with this method on both cropland and pastureland there are some precautions to take.

**Don't create a feedlot.** Stay away from environmentally sensitive areas such as streams, lakes, springs, or wetlands...any surface water for that matter. Other areas to stay away from include sinkholes, areas where there are endangered species or prairie remnants, archeological sites, or even conservation structures such as a dam. Keep a setback of at least 300 feet from your feeding area to any one of these areas.

**Develop a plan.** Figure out where you plan to feed ahead of time and how far that is to water sources and shelter if the weather really gets

bad. Although livestock prefer to be outside they will benefit from having wind protection in really cold or rainy weather when the temperature hovers around the freezing point. You may need to build temporary lanes to get them to each of these areas and to avoid sensitive areas (discussed earlier). Cattle can travel up to a mile to water in the winter. Try to concentrate the outwintering on as small an area as possible and don't use the same area any more than once in a five year period.

If you would like some free assistance in setting up an outwintering area, Dean Thomas and John Zinn would be glad to visit with you. They can show you some free planning aids and even come right to your farm.



## Body Condition Score Cows Now for Optimal Herd Production

Tim Goldsmith, DVM, MPH, DACVPM

With fall harvest complete, calves weaned, and winter coming on now is the time to consider the condition of your cows for optimum productivity over the next year. Early winter is possibly the best time to evaluate the Body Condition Score (BCS) of your cowherd. With calves weaned spring calving cows are currently in the lowest nutritional demand they will have for the year, making fall and early winter not only one of the best times to add condition but also if condition is needed the clock is ticking on available days to add it. Ideally cows should be in a BCS of between 5 and 6 at time of calving. There are multiple benefits to having this level of condition at calving. Cows that have this level of condition at calving have calves that demonstrate a higher level of absorption of immunoglobulin acquired from colostrum and are more likely to return to estrus earlier and thus have a higher likelihood of breeding back early in the calving season. These two factors have a major impact on the productivity of a cowherd. Calves that lack adequate colostrum intake are more likely to become sick throughout their life, which affects death rates as well as weaning weights. Cow herds not only need to maintain a 365 day calving interval, but a high proportion of cows need to calf early in the calving season, as early born calves are heavier at weaning and cows that slip back with late breedings are often culled from the herd for falling out of the calving window.

Evaluating condition in cows this time of year is important as cows needing added condition need the time to add it. Adding a change in BCS (from a 4 to a 5 or a 7 to a 6) will require a weight gain or loss of between 75 to 100 pounds depending on the mature size of the cows. In order to accomplish an increase of one BCS, a cow will need to gain 1 pound per day for 75 to 100 days. Depending on calving date this may be less or more due to available time. This will be in addition to meeting the maintenance needs of the cow along with fetal growth of the calf she is carrying. This weight gain is more easily added during mid gestation, as fetal growth demands will be higher later in gestation making adding BCS much more difficult or impossible. Also important considerations are cow age and facilities. Young cows (first and second calf heifers) need to be watched not only for BCS, but for maintenance of their BCS. This is extremely important as heifers are still growing, have nutritional demands of the calf, and for second calf heifers have been producing milk. In addition to these increased nutritional needs young cows can often fail to compete if housed with mature cows, this can not only prevent addition of BCS but lead to BCS loss. If these young cows are not managed properly, increases in calf loses as well as delayed breeding in this group can have great affects on the future of the herd as young

cows often represent the highest genetic value and expense in the herd. In order to accomplish this, separate facilities are often needed so that they can be managed for optimum production. Having adequate facilities is not just important for young cows but for the whole herd. Making sure all cows have adequate access to feed, especially if supplementing, is important to managing BCS. Otherwise dominate animals will get more than they need and non-dominate animals will get less or lesser quality feed. Less than adequate access to feed often results in wide variation of BCS in a herd with more over and under conditioned cows which not only will affect the productivity of the herd but results in inefficient feed utilization and higher costs. Planning now for facility needs is important so that BCS can be managed throughout the winter to achieve BCS targets at calving. Evaluating cows and heifers now for BCS and working with your nutritionist and veterinarian to address ration and facility needs will serve to support your herds' optimal productivity over the next year.

Body condition scoring (BCS) is an easy-to-use management tool to determine the nutritional needs of a cow herd, using a numeric scoring system from 1 (emaciated) to 9 (very fat). The American Angus Association has a great photo resource on BCS to help producers <http://www.cowbcs.info/photogallery.html>.

# Grazing Lands Conservation Association - Minnesota Chapter -

**Vision:** Promote Sustainable Grassland Resources in Minnesota

**Background:** The Minnesota Grazing Lands Conservation Association (GLCA) is a grassroots non-profit group organized to promote the health and sustainability of Minnesota's 2.5 million acres of grazing lands. The newly formed GLCA Minnesota Chapter is a voluntary group of producers from across Minnesota. Through a cooperative effort, the GLCA Minnesota Chapter's goal is to provide local leadership, guidance, information and technical assistance to grassland managers and producers. Given the appropriate tools and training, grassland managers and producers will be better prepared to make cost-effective and environmentally sound decisions. The GLCA Minnesota Chapter believes that through voluntary actions, respect for private property owner's rights, and education on the values and multiple benefits of well managed grazing resources, their goals are achievable.

**Values:**

- Learn from peer trial and experiences
- Open doors to grass management expertise
- Share alternatives and different perspectives
- Discover common objectives and goals through grassroots effort
- Generate new ideas



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