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WVDA Offers Tips in Lieu of Hay Shortage

Charleston W.Va. -- Due to recent concerns of a potential hay shortage in West Virginia, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA), Farm Service Agency (FSA) and WVU Extension Services are offering cattle farmers tips on how to maintain a healthy herd.

“Odds are we still have six weeks left of winter, if not more. With being halfway through the winter feed season, farmers must take stock if they have enough hay to keep a well-fed and healthy herd,” said Commissioner of Agriculture Kent Leonhardt. “If hay is in short supply, farmers will want to avoid turning cattle out too early as it could have affects on pasture feeding for next summer.”

A potential hay shortage is most likely due to an unusually wet 2018. The increased rainfall lead to ruined and reduced hay crops. The WVDA is working with FSA county offices and WVU County Extension agents to help farmers locate hay supplies or work through alternative feeding methods.

“Producers seeking hay or those selling hay are encouraged to contact their Farm Service Agency county office, located within their local USDA Service Center,” said FSA State Executive Director Roger Dahmer. “These lists are available to the public and can help connect sellers, buyers and those in need.”

The WVDA, FSA and WVU Extension Services are offering the following tips:

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- Inventory the hay supply on hand and compare it to feed demand. Cattle prefer to eat about 2.5% of their body weight in hay dry matter. That is about 28 lbs. of air-dry hay per 1000 lbs. body weight.
- Locate available hay, straw or corn fodder for purchase. This could mean trucking in feed from other states. Hay is generally the least costly feed for beef cattle.
- Consider limiting the hay to the animal's nutritional requirement. But be careful in doing so as cows need to be in a body condition score of 5 or 6 at calving, if they are to conceive the next calf on time.
- Keeping the body condition up on cows in cold weather helps reduce feed demand for maintaining body heat. Fat provides insulation from the cold and helps reduce shivering.
- Alternative sources of feed are soybean hull pellets, wheat midds, whole cotton seed or cotton seed hulls. These fibers are high in protein and should be available in West Virginia depending on your location in the state.
- Other good sources of protein include dry distiller's grain, corn gluten feed or soybean. These feeds provide good energy without any starch that would limit the digestibility of hay.
- Corn is often the go-to feed when hay supply is limited. However, corn is high in starch. If adequate protein is not mixed with the corn, this ends up reducing the digestibility of fiber in hay. A 14 percent crude protein feed made from commodity by-products without any corn (limiting the starch) is another good option.

“Farmers need to wait to turn out their herds until around April 15 in low elevations and May 10 in higher elevations. Proper planning and working with your fellow farmers are ways to keep the herd healthy until that time,” Leonhardt said.

To locate your local county FSA office: <http://offices.usda.gov>

More information can be found:

<https://extension.wvu.edu/files/d/4095370d-9c6c-4448-a092-862a676b2713/beef-cattle-nutrient-requirements.pdf>.

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture protects plant, animal and human health through a variety of scientific, regulatory and consumer protection programs. The Commissioner of Agriculture is one of six statewide elected officials who sits on the Board of Public Works.

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