Now is the perfect time to rebuild and reshape mounds in dirt lots, scrape pens, and ensure that moisture cannot accumulate in pens. Later, when ice and snow accumulate, these tasks become much more difficult.

Evaluate each pen to ensure that high and dry traffic patterns exist between feed, water, and resting areas within each pen. Think about problem spots in pens from last year and consider adding soil to those areas or even pouring concrete.

Make any necessary maintenance to buildings, wind breaks, waterers, etc.

Make sure snow removal equipment is in good working order. Timely snow removal this winter will mean less moisture and mud in the spring.

In addition to harvest and storage of feed, make sure that enough bedding is secured so cattle can have a comfortable place to rest.

As your cattle arrive, try to give them a stress-free environment as much as possible. This includes not only proper facility and housing maintenance, but an evaluation of handling facilities and proper training of employees on low-stress cattle handling.

Consult with your veterinarian and re-evaluate your protocols for arrival processing and treatments.

Consult your nutritionist to see about changes to reduce feed costs and improve cattle performance.
Timely tips for getting your feed supply ready for winter

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October weather concerns are usually focused on getting the corn and beans in the bin before the snow flies, but this is also the time to start thinking about our winter cow feeding plans as well. Here are a few tasks to check off your list on the next rainy day or as soon as the harvest is completed.

1. Subdivide or rotate your corn stalk fields. Group cows into larger units and rotate to fresh stalks about weekly. This will provide a better quality diet later into the winter grazing season by preventing the selective grazing early in the season.

2. Inventory your winter feed supply if you haven’t already, both quantity and quality.

3. Sample your hay supply by field and cutting, and send it in for nutrient analysis. If you are unsure about the procedures or testing labs, check out the forage page on our web site at http://www.iowabeefcenter.org/content/hay_production.html.

4. Determine supplement feeds based on the lowest cost per unit of nutrient. Watch for opportunities to purchase corn co-products now and store for future feeding.

5. Plan your rations based on stage of production: mid-gestation, late gestation, early lactation, and developing heifers, first and second calf heifers, and bulls.

6. Determine total winter feed needs. A 1300-lb cow will consume about 3500-4000 lb of feed in the average four-to-five month winter feeding period. Top producers can limit intake to closer to 3000 lb per cow depending on crop residue grazing, weather conditions, alternative feeds available, and feeding methods.

7. Purchase additional forages before peak feeding time or bale cornstalks before quality deteriorates, if feed supply is short.

8. Check hay feeders and repair if needed. A Michigan study compared four different feeder styles, two round feeders and two cradle-type feeders. The typical round bale ring feeder had 6% feeding loss, while that same ring with a cone insert to keep the bale up off the ground had only 3.5% loss. The cradle-type feeder with single bars and a bottom bunk or floor, had 14.6% loss, where a trailer type cradle feeder with double bars had only 11.4% waste. The slanted bar designs of the trailer and cone feeder encourage animals to keep their head in the feeder for longer periods while eating and protected the timid cows from the dominant cows.

9. Determine a plan for adding value through a high energy retained ownership program if cull cows haven’t already been sold.

online resources

Click on the tools and articles below for extra education available from our Web site, www.iowabeefcenter.org.

Tools:
- Feedlot Cost Assessment Tool
- Feedlot Environmental Management Tool
- Cow Winter Feeding Cost Assessment Tool
- Feed Energy Indexing Software

Articles:
- “Managing Cow Herd Feed Needs”
- “Ways to Reduce Handling Stress”
- “Wintertime Feeding for Reducing Cattle Stress”
- “Grazing Corn Residue: Using Resources and Reducing Costs”