

News Column

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WINTER FEED COSTS

I had a great high school math teacher. He was kind of a nerdy guy who wore plaid polyester slacks, wire-rimmed glasses, and a pocket protector in his shirt pocket to keep his pens organized. He wasn't everybody's favorite, but his teaching style worked for me.

What I appreciated most about Mr. Cassatt was that he let me do math my way and still gave me full credit for coming to the right answer. While the smart kids in the class were busy memorizing the formulas presented daily on the chalk board and in our text book, I preferred to look at problems with logic, and just figure it out.

Let's be honest. I was really just too lazy to study math every night. Memorizing formulas wasn't my thing and I didn't care if my grade was a B instead of an A because of it. I think I got A's in math anyway, but I really don't remember – it was almost 50 years ago.

If you are a regular reader, then you should know that I like math and I like to bore you by walking you through my calculations. So,...here we go again.

I haven't pulled up my ration balancing software for a few years to calculate what it costs to feed a cow each day through the winter. I used to do that more regularly with an older computer program but now that we have a "better" program I find it harder to use and don't use it as often.

All I'm wanting to know today is a rough cost to feed a cow each day, with plans to demonstrate how much you can save by grazing crop residues in the fall instead of feeding

harvested forages.

A cow will consume an amount of feed equal to about 2.2% of her body weight, daily. That is assuming a dry cow and good quality feed. She may only consume 1.7% of body weight of a poorer quality feed, and consumption can go up to 2.5% of body weight when lactating. For today's example, we'll use 2.2%

For a 1250 pound cow, 2.2% of body weight equals 27.5 pounds. I will assume 10% feed waste (that's low, your feed waste could easily be higher) to figure we need about 30 pounds of hay per cow per day.

I'll pull a number out of the air – or off the internet – and price the hay at \$150 per ton. Convert to a price per pound by dividing \$150 by 2,000 pounds per ton and we get to 7.5 cents per pound of hay. Multiply by 30 pounds and the cost to feed our cow is \$2.25 per day.

If you think you can buy good quality hay for \$100 per ton, then you could get your cost down to \$1.50 per head per day. I think that's unrealistic – if the hay is that cheap this year, you'll probably need to supplement with some kind of protein, but you do the math. What does it cost you to feed a cow each day?

If you're thinking about this at all, then you realize I haven't included any labor, fuel, or equipment costs in getting that hay delivered to our cow. What will that cost you? Maybe 25 cents per head per day? Maybe more.

If the cost of fencing scares you, I figure I could buy all new steel electric fence posts, insulators, poly wire, and a new energizer to build a mile of electric fence for under \$1,000. That will fence a square 160 acres of corn stalks.

That 160 acres of corn stalks, if it yielded 100 bushels per acre, should carry 160 cows for one month. So, if I can graze corn stalks for \$1 per head per day cheaper than feeding hay, that's

\$30 per cow saved times 160 cows,... \$4,800.

Deduct the cost of fence materials – which will be reusable for many years – and the \$3,800 in savings makes building electric fence look like a fun job.

If you have questions, you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to gmcclure@ksu.edu.

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