



Feed Prices

Darrell Rankins, Ph.D.

Alabama Cooperative Extension System Animal Scientist

If you fed cows this past winter you don't need anyone to tell you how high the cost of supplemental feed has gone. How can we manage these high input costs? The single, best management tool for dealing with high winter feed costs is having a storage facility and purchasing the feed at times of the year when it is substantially cheaper. In general, commodity feed prices tend to be substantially lower in May and June than they do the remainder of the year. In fact, during 2010 that price differential for various commodity feeds has been over \$100/ton. Both corn gluten feed and soyhulls were priced around \$100/ton or less during May/June 2010 and this winter they exceeded \$200/ton. With purchasing only two loads of feed, approximately 45 tons, that would have resulted in a feed savings of over \$4,500.

I think that if you do not have a feed storage facility it should be given serious consideration. When building a commodity shed, bigger would be better in my opinion. However, some general guidelines would be to have 14-foot eave heights and an individual bay be about 14 feet wide. In fact, an area that is 14 feet wide and 30 feet in length would hold well over a load (22 to 24 tons) of most commodity feeds stacked to a height of 6 feet. A commodity that might require additional space would

be a load of loose peanut hulls which have a very low bulk density.

Two of the more popular commodity feeds used in Alabama are corn gluten feed and soyhulls. Both of these feeds are priced as described above. Corn gluten feed is the by-product of the wet-milling process that produces starch, oil and syrup. Various processors differ in how they handle the product resulting in some variation among different lots of corn gluten feed. The crude protein content will be in excess of 18% and may be as high as 23 to 24%. The TDN content ranges from 80 to 87% (corn grain contains 90% TDN) and the variation is primarily a result of the drying process. If it gets too hot it will have a lower feed value, palatability problems and usually a darker color. Most of it is used in the pelleted form but it can be used in the loose form as well.

Processing soybeans for their oil leads to the generation of two byproducts soybean meal and soybean hulls. Soybean hulls are actually the skin of the soybean which comes off during processing. These soyhulls are quite small in size and are not very dense. Therefore, many soyhulls are pelleted to increase ease of handling and bulk density. With respect to nutritional value, the loose and pelleted hulls are equal. Soyhulls are a relatively safe feed

that are extremely palatable to cattle and when used as a supplement to a forage-based diet provide similar energy as corn. The protein content of soyhulls is generally between 11 and 12%. Loose soyhulls have the same nutritional value as pelleted soyhulls. The pelleted form has approximately the same bulk density as shelled corn whereas the loose hulls have about 2/3 the bulk density as the pellets. When fed in excess of 7 pounds per day to growing cattle bloat can be a problem.

Many cattlemen have started feeding blends of corn gluten feed and soyhulls and these two complement one another quite well. The corn gluten feed increases the protein content and reduces the incidence of bloat while the soyhulls increase palatability and decrease the incidence of founder. The bottom line is that you need to be thinking about feed purchases in May and June and not waiting until the winter months to make all of your feed purchases.

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