

## Managing Body Conditioning Score (BCS)

Feeding practices vary from farm to farm and some approaches have the potential to affect BCS more than others. In this latter part of 2020 we are seeing the price of feed rising and once again we are making decisions about feeding to maximize forage and grain utilization by the animals. Precision feeding has become a reliable method of meeting nutrient requirements and reducing waste. As best we can, given the conditions beef and sheep farms operate under, rations are prepared and delivered to ensure the animal eats a balanced ration until full then she lies down to rest and ruminate.

When fed a TMR mixed ration or a chopped dry forage ration, compared to free choice long forage, cows eat more quickly and spend more time ruminating and resting. Daily consumption for all methods is about equal, but waste is not equal being higher for feeding long forage. Animals will eat more quickly and spend more time resting and ruminating<sup>1</sup>. Experienced operators using a properly calibrated 1251 Bale Pro<sup>®</sup> can also accomplish this task by proportionally blending dry forages and grain and providing only what is needed by the herd on a weight per animal basis. Recently I was talking with a producer who blended up the silage, grain and mineral portion of the ration for the herd and then fed the straw portion separately in long form. This approach minimizes time on the tractor and TMR which would have been necessary to completely cut the straw to the proper length. However the cows sort and leave enough straw that it provides bedding for them. It suggests that the animals are going to be short on nutrients that would have been provided by the uneaten straw leading to a pre-calving drop in BCS. Using a Highline Bale Pro<sup>®</sup> to preprocess long forage material before mixing in the TMR, the cows will eat the complete ration then the desired amount of straw for bedding can be applied accurately with the Bale Pro<sup>®</sup> in the bedding setting in a separate task. This approach also considers the hours used by tractor and mixer, and the need for the cow to eat a complete nutritionally sound ration. According to the Saskatchewan Machinery Rental and Custom Rates for 2020-2021 a twin screw mixer and a bale processor cost the same to operate per hour. Depreciation and investment however is lower for the bale processor. The Bale Pro<sup>®</sup> can replace the tub grinder, deliver an equivalent product and bed the animals quickly. It is a good idea to preprocess all forages for a TMR ration from both a nutritional and economic standpoint.

The goal is to maintain BCS so that calving, rebreeding and subsequent calf health and growth are optimal. Now is the window of time to be feeding the herd to build BCS for animals coming off pasture a little thin. Highline's efficient line of Bale Pros<sup>®</sup> are an economical solution for dry forage chopping and blending/feeding and bedding applications.

1. Performance, behaviour and meat quality of beef heifers fed concentrate and straw offered as total mixed ration or free-choice. Sergio P. Iraira<sup>1</sup>, Ana Madruga<sup>1</sup>, María Pérez-Juan<sup>2</sup>, José L. Ruiz-de-la-Torre<sup>1</sup>, María Rodríguez-Prado<sup>1</sup>, Sergio Calsamiglia<sup>1</sup>, Xavier Manteca<sup>1</sup> and Alfred Ferret<sup>1</sup>

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### CORPORATE RUMINANT NUTRITIONIST

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