

SOUTHEAST AREA EXTENSION SAYS

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Cows “Chasing Green”

SOUTHEAST AREA—Spring is an exciting time for ranchers in Southeast Colorado. Cows are calving and the grass is starting to grow and turn green.

But just because the grass is turning green, doesn't mean the cows are getting the nutrition they require. As an old rancher saying goes, “A cow can starve to death chasing green.”

The two most important nutrients are protein and energy. The fresh green grass, although high in protein, does not supply enough energy for a cow at this time of year and there isn't enough of the green grass to supply all of the protein requirements either. Mineral supplementation is also important during this critical time period to improve calf vigor and prepare for reproductive success. Cows should be in a body condition score of 5 or 6 at the time of calving to breed back quickly.

The most critical time to manage cow nutrition is from 60 days prior to calving through breeding. During the pre-calving and post-calving period, a cow's energy and protein needs can increase by 20% or more. A cow's peak energy demand occurs with peak lactation, which is about 60 days after calving. Protein requirements increase from about 1.5 pounds per animal per day for a dry cow to almost 3 pounds per day during early lactation. The



**Southeast Area
Extension**

County Extension Offices

Baca County

772 Colorado St.
Springfield, CO 81073
719-523-6971

Bent County

1499 Amb. Thompson Blvd.
Las Animas, CO 81054
719-456-0764

Cheyenne County

425 S. 7th W.
P. O. Box 395
Cheyenne Wells, CO 80810
719-767-5716

Crowley County

603 North Main St.
Courthouse Annex
Ordway, CO 81063
719-267-5243

Kiowa County

1305 Goff
P. O. Box 97
Eads, CO 81036
719-438-5321

Otero County

411 N. 10th
P. O. Box 190
Rocky Ford, CO 81067
719-254-7608

Prowers County

1001 S. Main
Lamar, CO 81052
719-336-7734

actual requirements will vary depending upon the size of the animal and how much milk is produced. If a cow is “chasing green” looking for the young tender grass with higher protein, she is not getting enough energy to maintain condition and be ready to breed.

Just because you see the green grass starting to grow, doesn't mean that you can quit supplementing your cows. Make sure they have all the nutrients they require so they can go to work for you by bringing healthier calves to market this fall and income for the next year. This may require investments in analyzing feeds, particularly to choose the best mineral supplementation program for your operation. Pay special attention to heifers, as they not only have the increased nutrient demand for lactation, but are still growing themselves.

More information about cow and heifer nutrient needs can be found at www.csubeef.com or by contacting your local Colorado State University Extension office.

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