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AGRONOMY & BEEF BULLETIN

November 2026

SINCE 1929

Augusta Cooperative Farm Bureau, Inc.

TAKE STOCK OF FORAGE SUPPLY BEFORE WINTER FEEDING BEGINS

Cattle producers should complete a forage inventory now to aid in making ranch-level decisions and reducing costs.

Due to the significant impacts of drought on forage production in 2026, forage supplies may be tight this winter.

Now is a good time for cattle producers to evaluate forage supplies and develop a feeding plan for winter, according to North Dakota State University Extension specialists.



"Understanding how much forage is available, what it costs and how much may be lost during feeding can help producers manage one of the largest expenses in cattle operations," says Vinicius de Souza Izquierdo, NDSU Extension beef cattle specialist.

The first step is to conduct an inventory of hay, silage and other feeds available for winter. For harvested hay, bales should be grouped by lot, defined as similar species harvested from the same field within a 48-hour period.

James Rogers, NDSU Extension forage crops production specialist, recommends using a commercial scale to estimate bale weight by weighing several loads or multiple individual bales. Once the weight is known, determine the dry matter content, because moisture affects weight but does not provide nutrients to the animal.

Dry matter can be determined using a Koster moisture tester, the microwave moisture testing method, any other electronic method or by submitting a sample to a commercial laboratory. If dry matter is unknown, an estimate of 85%-90% can be used for an initial hay inventory; however, laboratory analysis is recommended for ration balancing.

The second step is to estimate feed needs, according to Karl Hoppe, NDSU Extension livestock systems specialist. Intake varies depending on forage quality, animal size, production stage, weather and supplementation.

"For initial planning, an estimate of 2.5% of body weight can be used to determine forage dry matter intake per animal per day," says Hoppe.

Having enough hay on paper does not mean all of it will be consumed. If forage is stored outside, dry matter losses could be as high as 20%, while losses may decrease to about 7% when stored inside.

Feeding losses also vary by feed quality and feeding system. When hay is fed in bunks, waste may range from 3% to 14%, according to Rogers.

"If bales are rolled out on the ground, waste could reach 45%, particularly when cattle are provided multiple days of hay at one time," says Rogers.

With free-choice access to large quantities of forage, intake also may increase beyond what is needed to meet requirements.

If conditions allow, daily feeding can help reduce waste. For example, if hay costs $100 per ton, reducing waste by 25% could save approximately $25 per ton. These savings may help offset the cost of investments in equipment such as feed bunks, bale processors or feed wagons.

Producers also should include an allowance for potential storage and feeding losses.

When purchasing hay, the price per ton or bale does not necessarily indicate the best value. Producers should consider bale weight, moisture content, nutrient concentration and transportation costs. A less expensive bale is not necessarily a less expensive source of nutrients.

These calculations can help identify a potential forage shortage, but actual feeding decisions should consider forage quality and cattle nutrient requirements, according to Miranda Meehan, NDSU Extension livestock environmental stewardship specialist.

"Laboratory forage analysis and a balanced ration are recommended when developing the winter feeding program," says Meehan.

Beef Magazine

ESTIMATING HAY NEEDS FOR THE COW HERD

Amount needed to sustain the herd can be calculated using average mature cow size, cow inventory and feeding timeframe.

Here are some basic rules of thumb to follow when determining the hay supplies you will need to sustain your cow herd over the next few months:

Determine your average mature cow size.

This can be done by weighing your four- to seven-year-old cows and calculating the average weight. From mature cow size, we can approximate the amount of forage dry matter cows will need to consume per year or per day. For example: a 1,000-pound cow will consume about 26 pounds of forage dry matter per day. A 1,400-pound cow will consume about 36.4 pounds of forage dry matter per day.

Determine your cow inventory and estimate the amount of time you expect to be feeding cows.

From this information, you can calculate the total amount of hay needed. For example: 100 cows weighing 1,400 pounds will consume about 3,640 pounds of hay per day. We should take into account that a certain amount of the hay fed will be wasted, and there will be a certain amount of spoilage of each bale fed that won't be consumed. With this in mind, we will add another 10% to the daily total to bump it up to about 4,000 pounds (2 tons) per day. Remember, the amount of hay wasted or spoiled could be higher. If feeding hay from last year, expect a higher percentage spoiled in each bale.

If we are expecting to feed hay from mid-October to mid-May, that is approximately 200 days of hay feeding: 4,000 pounds of hay needed per day x 200 days equals a total of 800,000 pounds (400 ton) of forage dry matter that cows will consume over this time. If we are feeding or buying large rounds with an average weight of 1,250 pounds, that equates to 640 (800,000 divided by 1,250) big bales needed to sustain the 100 cows.

If possible, purchase hay by the ton. It leads to less error in securing the amount of hay you will need to purchase or have on inventory. If buying hay by the bale is your only option, make sure to weigh enough of the bales to have an accurate representation of bale weight. Also, take into account the amount of spoilage of each bale. One of the upsides of hay baled this summer (and the drought over the past few months) is less spoilage.

Other factors, such as weather, stage of gestation or lactating versus dry cows, will obviously impact nutritional requirements of cows from day to day. Provide hay and other nutritional supplementation accordingly.

Oklahoma State University Extension

BEEF PRODUCERS CAN EXPECT STRONG RETURNS FOR FALL-MARKETED CALVES

Beef Outlook: Feedlot inventories rise slightly as cattle stay in yards longer and higher prices prevail.

After a brutal summer and fall market correction, cattle markets are recovering through September. However, uncertainty and volatility due to headlines remain a significant threat, especially until after the November elections.

Calf prices, which took the biggest hit in the summer, are bouncing back and may continue to move counterseasonally higher this fall. Drought remains a significant factor, in some cases prompting early marketing of calves, as well as liquidation of cows.

Feeder cattle supplies continue to tighten. From June through mid-September, total feeder and stocker cattle receipts through auctions, direct trade, and video or internet have been down 11.9% year over year.

What's happening in the feedlot?

The September Cattle on Feed report included August placements that were down 9.2% year over year. This follows July placements being down 11% compared to last year.

Average feedlot placements for the past 12 months are the lowest in available COF data back to 1996. Feedlot marketings in August were down 3.3% from last year, and the 12-month average of marketings is also at a record low.

Feedlot inventories on Sept. 1 were at 11.163 million head, up 0.7% year over year, and the fifth consecutive month above year-earlier levels.

Larger feedlot inventories are not due to more cattle being generally available, but they are the result of an ever-slower feedlot marketing rate. Cattle are simply staying in feedlots longer despite decreasing feedlot production.

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On average in the past year, feedlots marketed 14.1% of cattle on feed each month. The average feedlot marketing rate for 30 years was 16.3%.

Feedlots are likely to face increased challenges in coming months as feeder supplies continue to tighten.

Feedlot marketing rates are expected to remain low, but they probably will not continue to decrease further, leading to declining feedlot inventories as placements fall relative to marketings.

Additionally, high feeder prices and increased cost of gain will squeeze feedlot margins significantly in coming months.

Cattle cycle update

The latest direct data on the beef cow inventory in July indicated that the beef cow herd has continued to decline in 2026. The July 1 beef cow herd was down 0.7% from one year ago.

However, modest increases in the inventory of beef replacement heifers suggest that limited heifer retention may be beginning. This is corroborated by heifer slaughter, which is down 11.3% year over year so far in 2026.

Beef cow slaughter is down 13.7% for the year to date through mid-September, on top of a 40.5% decrease from 2022 to 2025. A record-low beef herd culling rate of about 7.3% is expected for 2026.

These are signs that the beef cow herd is perhaps stabilizing in 2026.

The female (cow plus heifer) slaughter percentage is decreasing, but it is still higher than the typical threshold to confirm herd rebuilding. It also shows that when the female slaughter percentage drops below 47%, it has been a reliable indicator of herd expansion in the past four cattle cycles.

Heading into 2027, the beef cow herd may hold steady year over year, with an inventory plus or minus unchanged from 2026.

A slight increase in the beef cow herd is possible and would at least confirm a cyclical inventory low.

No significant herd growth is expected in 2027, but momentum could build for growth in the last years of the decade.

Finishing out 2026

Cattle markets are expected to finish the year strong in the fourth quarter, albeit subject to continued external shocks and volatility.

Cow-calf producers can expect another set of good returns for fall calf marketing with calf prices counterseasonally strong to finish the year. End-of-year recovery in feeder and fed prices is expected.

However, record-high diesel prices, higher corn prices and continuing drought conditions all indicate that production costs will increase as well.

For beef consumers, beef production is down thus far in 2026. It is expected to be down about 4.5% for the entire year, keeping beef prices high.

Oklahoma State University Extension

FEEDING CATTLE DURING DROUGHT? 5 CATTLE NUTRITION TIPS

Cattle nutrition and management strategies can help preserve your bottom line when feeding cattle during drought.

Drought can be unpredictable. Set your herd up for success no matter what Mother Nature throws your way with these strategies:

1. Extend pastures.

Your forage base is your most valuable resource; help your cattle make the most of it.

- Use strategic management practices to improve grazing distribution. By spreading cattle out, they'll be more likely to graze underutilized areas.
- Position self-fed products, like Accuration® Range supplements, in strategic locations, generally away from the water source, to spread out cows at pasture.

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2. Early weaning calves.

Especially during short-term droughts, early weaning calves is a useful strategy to reduce cow nutrient requirements.

- During the latter part of lactation, calves demand a lot from cows. Early weaning calves can offer cows time to recover body condition before their next calving season – potentially improving rebreeding performance.1 Wean calves up to 60 days early, depending on drought severity.
- Feed weaned calves high-quality, complete starter feed, like Precon® Complete feed or Accuration® Starter Complete feed, when there is no roughage available.
- Before early weaning calves, it's advisable to creep feed calves. Start with a conventional creep feed product followed by an Accuration® creep program. Specific formulations are available to meet the needs of lightweight calves; visit with your local nutritionist to determine the best option.

3. Extend feedstuffs.

If pasture forage isn't adequate, there are still options for feeding cattle during drought.

- Use high-quality cattle supplements during drought to make sure cattle nutrition is up to par. Products like Accuration® Cattle Limiter and Accuration® Forage Extender can help stretch forage resources. Talk with your local Purina dealer to help plan for feeding cattle during drought.
- In extreme drought conditions, consider feeding cattle in confinement. If you have access to commodity feedstuffs and the management capability to provide a TMR, your local nutritionist can help develop a maintenance ration.

Augusta Co-op Solutions

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4. Cull low performing cattle.

Despite all the right management practices, sometimes liquidation is inevitable.

- Match herd numbers to your available cattle nutrition resources. Start by culling the lowest-performing cows in the herd, especially open cows.
- Use this as an opportunity to retain your best cows, then rebuild your herd in the genetic direction you desire when forages are back to normal post-drought.

5. Don't forget the basics.

- Monitor natural water sources, such as ponds and tanks, to ensure cattle have adequate access to clean water.
- Test harvested forages for nutrient content and nitrate risk. Hay cut under drought conditions might contain high levels of nitrate and prussic acid.
- Beware of toxic plants, as cattle grazing short pasture are more likely to consume toxic plants. Talk to your local extension agent or forage specialist to identify potential toxic plant risk in your area.

Purina Mills





NOVEMBER 5TH

5:30 – 8:00 PM (after store hours)

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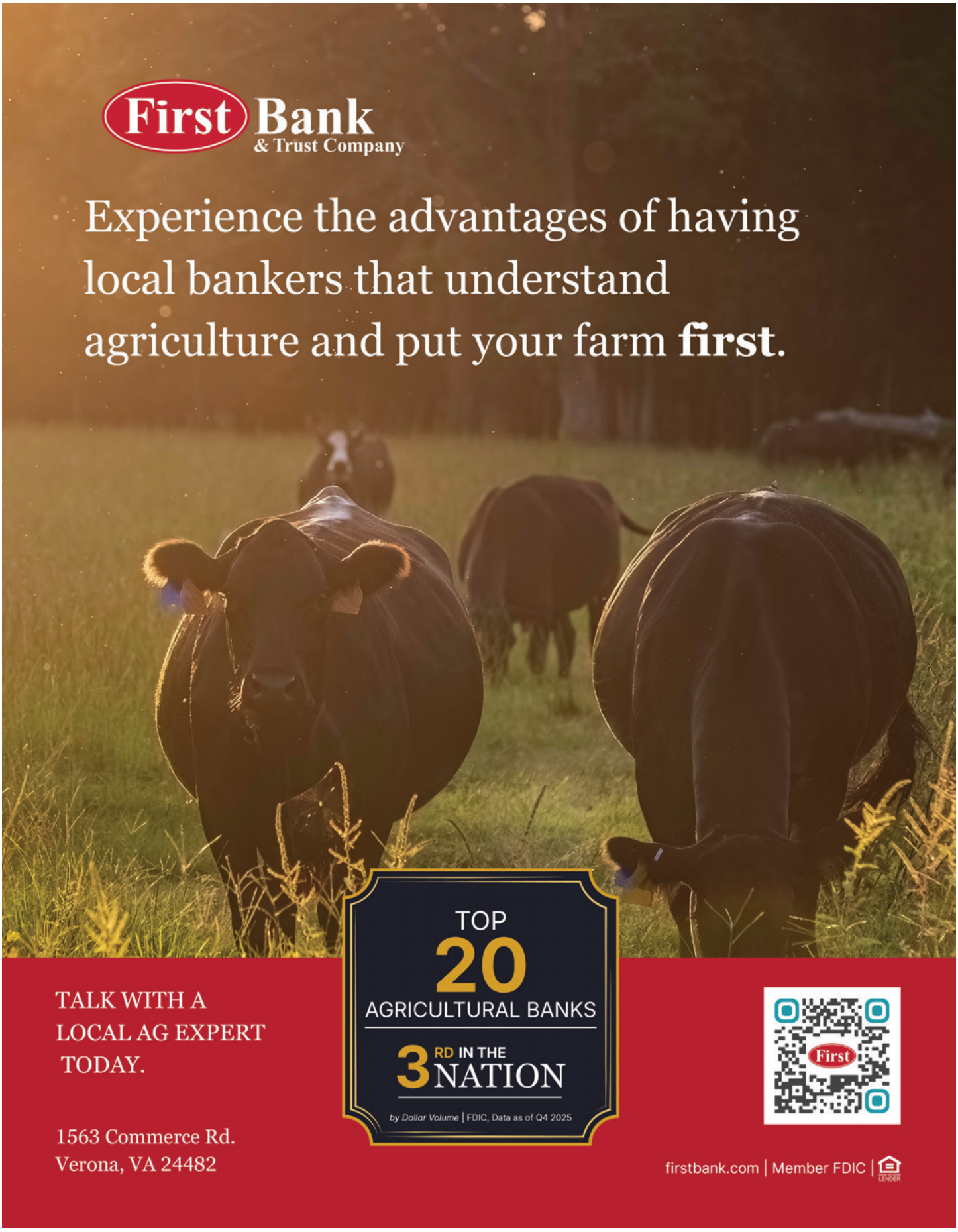
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EVENTS / CALENDAR

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AGRONOMY CUSTOMER APPRECIATION

February 5, 2027 • 11AM-2PM

Augusta Expo - Building 2
277 Expo Rd, Fishersville, VA 22939
Meet the agronomy team and enjoy lunch on us!
Vendors will be in attendance.

RSVP required by January 29, 2027.
Staci Alger • SAlger@AugustaCoop.com
(540) 885-1265 x 253

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