

# Ten Ways to Cut Cattle Feeding Costs

The cattle business has been a tale of two stories over the past year. While cow-calf profits have remained near record highs, cattle feeders have suffered losses of historic proportions in some months. While lower grain and feed prices may help in the months ahead, that is only part of the picture for feedlots to remain competitive and profitable.

A few years ago, I put together a top 10 list for cutting cattle feeding costs. The following is an updated (and abbreviated) version of that list. Perhaps some of these strategies will work for you.

- 1. **Good records.** Monitoring feedlot performance and costs allows producers to make midcourse corrections. This is particularly important as feed costs rise and cattle prices change. Knowing current costs of production is essential to making timely marketing and management decisions. Several feed companies and veterinarians provide feedlot monitoring as a service. The ISU Feedlot Monitoring Software version 3.0 is now available for this purpose. Learn more about this program on the [Iowa Beef Center website](#).
- 2. **Purchase cost.** Purchase cost often is the largest single cost associated with a finished beef animal. Careful budgeting prior to purchase is extremely important in times of narrow margins. Good records of previous close-outs and past history of cattle from a source is useful in projecting cattle performance. Often the cheapest cattle may not be the most profitable depending on performance and efficiency. Use realistic cost and price projections when budgeting for

new feeder cattle, and pay close attention to market conditions. Periods of low prices and price volatility can create opportunities for the astute cattle buyer.

- 3. **Feed bunk management.** Managing feed bunks more closely can improve efficiency by reducing the incidence of low level acidosis on high grain rations. Using a bunk scoring system, or some method to reduce feed waste, can pay greater dividends during periods of high grain costs. An added benefit may be more consistent performance and better efficiency by eliminating the day-to-day variation in feed consumption. Good feed bunk management also includes proper feed mixing and accurate weighing of feed ingredients. Look for an updated fact sheet on feed bunk management coming soon from the Iowa Beef Center.
- 4. **Alternative feedstuffs.** Even with low-cost corn, alternative feeds may help lower costs. Your best bet is to look locally for feeds that may have a transportation cost advantage in your ration. [Corn coproducts](#) may still be an opportunity but changes in the ethanol industry have introduced variability and changes in value.
- 5. **Feed additives.** Ionophores like Bovatec, CattyIst, and Rumensin will improve efficiency 4 to 10 percent, depending on the type of ration fed. As feed costs increase, the payback for improved efficiency is much greater. Optaflexx (a beta-agonist) will improve carcass gain in the last 28 days of feeding.

- 6. Implants.** Implant technologies and strategies can improve efficiency 10 to 15 percent. Learn about the differences in implants and choose the one that matches your cattle and management practices.
- 7. Marketing.** Limited beef supplies in recent months have encouraged heavier market weights. Timely marketing can significantly reduce the cost of production however. The trade-offs between cost of gain, increased dressing percentage and carcass value changes need to be continually monitored.
- 8. Receiving and health programs.** Getting cattle off to a fast and healthy start can cut costs and minimize death losses. Talk to your veterinarian about up-to-date vaccination protocols and make sure both your veterinarian and nutritionist are on the same page with your receiving program.
- 9. Mineral supplementation.** Evaluate your mineral supplementation program. Are you feeding a supplement or balancer that is complete with minerals and supplementing minerals free choice? If your mineral is a free choice mineral, is it the right one? Phosphorous is one of the most expensive nutrients added to most mineral supplements. On a high corn or corn coproduct ration, supplemental phosphorous likely isn't needed.

**10. Do the little things.** Basic management that requires little more than time can pay big rewards in improving efficiency when feed costs are high. These include routine water maintenance and cleaning, feeding cattle at the same time every day, handling cattle to reduce stress, and maintaining quality control on feed ingredients.

#### **More Information**

Iowa Beef Center at Iowa State University serves as the university's extension program to cattle producers. Our center comprises a team of faculty and staff from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the College of Veterinary Medicine and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. We work together to develop and deliver the latest in research-based information to improve the profitability and vitality of Iowa's beef industry. Call us at 515-294-BEEF or e-mail us at [beefcenter@iastate.edu](mailto:beefcenter@iastate.edu). If you'd like to be notified of updates on progress of research projects or programs that might be coming to your area, subscribe to the "[Growing Beef](#)" newsletter by following the link on our website. You can also follow [@iowabeefcenter](#) on Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. And, of course, be sure to "like" us on [Facebook](#).

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