

The Economic Importance of Sorting your Cows based on their Nutritional Requirements

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Your cows enjoy the “sweet treat” they get each year during the fall and winter months, but how much are you enjoying paying that feed bill? With high input prices, it is vital to be intentional with planning and budgeting how to raise heavy calves while maintaining a healthy cow herd. One way to potentially save on the cost of supplementing is to sort your cattle based on their nutritional requirements. Sorting your cow herd may sound like a lot of extra time spent doing extra work. However, you may already be spending extra time and money on feeding all your cows the same diet when some of them may not necessarily need the supplements being given to them (Table 1).

As a result of the Winter Supplementation Program hosted by the *South Florida Beef Forage Program* in September 2022, 52% of attendees (20) indicated that they would start sorting their cows based on their nutritional requirements. Based on this response, how much could each of these producers potentially save in feed costs? This article intends to estimate these savings using a scenario of feeding liquid feed during the fall and winter months (210 days) to a cow herd that consists of lactating cows (70) and dry cows (30) (Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 1. CP Nutrient Requirements & Needs of a 1,000-pound Cow

Forage: Bahiagrass – 50% TDN, 6.8% CP <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/AA192>

Avg. DMI: 22lbs/hd/day for lactating cow, 21 lbs/hd/day for dry cow <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/an190>

Group	Nutrient Requirements	Nutrients Supplied by Forage	Nutrients Needed
Lactating Cow	1.82	1.5	0.32
Dry Cow	1.4	1.4	0

Table 2. Feeding Rate & Cost of Each Group

Supplement: Liquid Feed, 32% CP at 1 lb/hd/day at \$375/ton

Group	Total Cost	Cost/Head
Lactating Cows	\$2,756.25	\$39.38
Dry Cows	\$0	\$0

Table 3. Expense Comparison & Savings

*Lactating cow diet

Feeding Program	Cost/Head	Total Cost
All Together*	\$39.38	\$3,937.50
Sorted	\$39.38	\$2,756.25

Savings/Producer

\$1,181.25

Savings/Head

\$11.81

While this scenario is not representative of all Florida cattle producers, it is a tool that producers can use as a guide to estimate their supplemental feed costs and analyze changes that may need to be made on their operations. Maintaining a healthy cow herd is the first step in selling heavy, marketable calves. Through forage sampling and sorting cows based on their nutritional needs, producers can potentially reduce costs and take advantage of an increase in profits.

Contact your local county agent for any questions regarding how you can develop your feeding program.

