A question often asked regarding supplementing grazing cattle is how frequently should supplement be fed. This question has been addressed in a number of research studies throughout the U.S.

We conducted a study at the Everglades REC at Belle Glade with yearling steers grazing St. Augustine grass pasture. One group was fed 5.6 lbs of corn-based supplement per steer daily. The second group was fed 16.8 lbs of supplement every third day, thus 5.6 lbs per day. The performance of both groups was identical, with an average gain of 1.1 lbs. per steer daily.

In New Mexico, researchers compared feeding 7 lbs of cottonseed cake to yearling heifers once weekly vs. 2.3 lbs three times weekly. There were no differences in heifer gains or conception rate between the two treatments.

In Texas, Dr. Lippke compared feeding 14 lbs of cottonseed meal per week to brood cows either daily (2 lbs per day), 3 times per week (4.7 lbs per feeding), or once weekly (14 lbs per feeding). They observed no difference in cow or calf gains between the three supplementation treatments.

Dr. Bill Kunkle did an extensive review of about 15 studies on supplementation frequency of either high protein dry supplements or high energy dry supplements. Results of these studies indicated that infrequent supplementation of 2 or 3 times weekly is as equally effective as daily feeding to brood cows or young, growing cattle. Cattle fed supplements once weekly tended to perform slightly poorer than cattle supplemented more frequently, but the difference did not appear to be large enough to overcome lower labor cost associated with infrequent feeding.

When feeding limited amounts of dry concentrate supplement it is necessary to provide adequate trough space to make sure all cattle have access to supplement. Adequate trough space may be more important with infrequent supplementation.

At the Range Cattle REC we feed molasses supplements twice weekly, and in some situations once weekly. With molasses, cows lick a limited amount of liquid feed from
the trough then move back. This eating pattern gives all cattle a chance to consume supplement. Also, a three or four day feeding of molasses to provide 5 lbs per cow per day will not be consumed immediately, usually requiring a day or more for cows to clean the trough.

The above information tells us that cattle do not have to be fed supplement every day to be efficient. Infrequent supplementation works well and can be designed to free up weekends and other days when time does not permit putting out supplement.

For questions or comments regarding this publication contact Findlay Pate