MANITOBA AGRICULTURE / DECEMBER 2025

Beef and Forage Technical Bulletin 19th Edition

Dry Cow Feeding Tips

- Winter feed costs are the single biggest expense in a cow/calf operation. Consider alternative feeds if supplies are low. It is important to feed a properly balanced ration.
- When sourcing feedstuffs, compare prices based on per pound of desired nutrient such as protein or TDN. For help with these calculations, use the Manitoba Agriculture FeedPlan.
- You want to keep feed costs low but still meet the animals' nutritional requirements. Poor nutrition will affect production and reproduction.
- Send forage/grain samples for feed analysis as feed quality can vary greatly. Feed probes are available at all MASC Service Centres and at participating Watershed District Offices.
- Separate your herd into different feeding groups according to their nutritional needs and body condition scores (BCS) as follows: weaned calves, thin and young cows, mature cows, herd sires and young bulls.
- Cows should be in good flesh, BCS 2.5 to 3. If cows are in poor body condition, increase the energy in their ration to get them in better shape before temperatures drop.
- Feed lowest quality forage/feed to mature, dry cows during early winter in mid-gestation; medium quality forage to dry cows in late gestation, prior to calving; and high-quality forage to lactating cows and young growing calves.
- When the temperature dips below -20°C, be sure to increase feed 10-15 per cent for every 10°C drop below -20°C.
- If feeding grain and straw-based rations, pay particular attention to protein and energy. If they are not sufficient, cows can over-consume straw on a cold night and end up impacted.
- Maintain a rising plane of nutrition three to four weeks prior to calving. This is important for adequate milk production, return to estrus and high conception rates.
- See below for ration options to be used as guidelines only. They should not replace feed analysis and individual ration balancing.

Cow Ration Options for Pre Calving*	35 lbs Alfalfa Grass Hay
16 lbs Alfalfa Grass Hay 19 lbs Barley Greenfeed	10 lbs Alfalfa Grass Hay 15 lbs Barley Straw 32 lbs Corn Silage
17 lbs Barley Straw 48 lbs Barley Silage 0.5 lbs 32% Feedlot Supplement	19 lbs Barley Straw 47 lbs Corn Silage 0.5 lbs 32% Feedlot Supplement
23 lbs Barley Straw 14 lbs 20% Pro. Pellets	23 lbs Barley Straw 11 lbs Barley Grain 1.0 lbs 32% Feedlot Supplement

* Based on 1400 lbs cow. Rations will also need to be balanced with salt, mineral and possibly limestone. For cost estimates and further details, visit 2026 Cost of Production Beef Cow-Calf

Manitoba

Stock Talk!

Manitoba Agriculture is offering a series of interesting livestock and forage presentations, packed with information and featuring innovative leading specialists, aimed at helping Manitoba beef producers best manage their cattle operations. Find out the latest news on research and production for beef and forage management by participating in these virtual sessions.

Date: Nov. 13, Dec. 11, Jan. 8, Feb. 5, March 12 & April 9
Time: 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.
Place: Your computer, smartphone or tablet

Register for StockTalk webinar

Please add the webinar series to your calendar once you are registered.

Agenda

Presentations and topics will cover Cattle Nutrition & Rations, Beef Cost of Production, Agri-Stability, Cattle Marketing, Beef and Forage Days Highlights, Ask the Vet, Forage Production & Management, Pasture Forage & Water Survey Results & a chance to ask questions to the speakers and Livestock & Forage Specialists.

For more information, call Manitoba Agriculture | 1-844-769-6224
Or visit our website

Manitoba Agriculture Livestock and Forage Extension Staff List

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Winter Feed & Water Survey

Submit basic forage test to receive complimentary analysis of primary winter water source and forage trace mineral analysis

Contact 1-844-769-6224 to participate

Limited spots available in each region

The Importance of Water Quality in Beef Cattle Production

Water is often the most overlooked nutrient in a beef cattle operation, yet it's the one cattle need the most of — both in quantity and quality.

Cattle consume large volumes of water daily — from 20 to 80 litres per head depending on environmental temperature, body weight, and production stage. Water that tastes or smells off can reduce intake of both water and feed. Reduced water intake directly affects digestion, weight gain, milk production, and fertility. Poor-quality water can also lead to more serious issues, such as:

- Toxicity or mineral imbalances when concentrations of certain elements (like sulfates or nitrates) are high.
- Alkalosis or acidosis if the pH is too extreme.
- Interference with mineral absorption, such as high sulfur reducing copper availability.
- Animal health problems, including scours, poor hair coats, or decreased immune function.

Testing your cattle's water sources once a year is a good rule of thumb. Additional testing should be conducted whenever:

- Cattle show unexplained performance drops or health issues.
- Water sources change (for example, moving to a new pasture or using dugout water impacted by drought).
- You notice algae growth, odours, or colour changes in the water.

What to Test For

A standard livestock water quality test will measure several key parameters. Understanding what they mean can help you act before problems arise. When evaluating the suitability of a water supply, be sure to consider the mineral content of the feed the cattle are consuming.

Parameter	Why It Matters	Typical Guideline for Beef Cattle
Total Dissolved Solids (TDS)	Measures all dissolved substances in water; high TDS can reduce palatability, cause diarrhea and result in decreased performance	< 3,000 mg/L is generally safe; > 5,000 mg/L is considered poor and may negatively affect all animal classes.
Sulfates	High levels can cause diarrhea and interfere with copper absorption; may contribute to polioencephalomalacia (PEM).	< 500 mg/L is generally safe; > 1,000 mg/L is risky. Tolerance will depend on the level of sulphur in the feed.
pH	Influences both water and feed intake. pH outside the acceptable range can induce acidosis or have a laxative effect and disrupt normal digestion.	6.0 – 8.0 is ideal.
Hardness	Not a livestock water quality issue, but may cause scaling in water distribution systems.	< 100 mg/L is considered soft; 101-2000 mg/L is hard.
Iron	Can affect taste, promote bacterial growth, and clog water lines.	< 0.3 mg/L is acceptable; > 0.3 mg/L may taste bad, but generally has minimal effect on intake or productivity.

If you're unsure how to interpret your results, contact your local provincial extension specialist, veterinarian or nutritionist — they can help you make sense of the numbers and suggest practical solutions. For more complete information, the Beef Cattle Research Council recently released an excellent resource titled "Interpretation of **Water Analysis Results for Beef Cattle**".

This guide can be found by scanning the QR code found here.

Good-quality water supports every aspect of cattle health and performance. By taking the time to test and understand your water, you're investing in the foundation of your herd's productivity.

Approximate Total Daily Water Intake of Beef Cattle

	Intake in litres for temperatures in Celcius (C)					
Animal Description	**4.4°C**	**10.0°C**	**14.4°C**	**21.1°C**	**26.6°C**	**32.2°C**
Growing Cattle (Approx 400 lbs)	15.1	16.3	18.9	22.0	25.4	36.0
Growing Cattle (Approx 600 lbs)	20.1	22.0	25.0	29.5	33.7	48.1
Growing Cattle (Approx 900 lbs)	23.0	25.7	29.9	34.8	40.1	56.8
Bred Heifers	22.7	24.6	28.0	32.9	-	-
Pregnant Cows	22.7	24.6	28.0	32.9	-	-
Lactating Cows	43.1	47.7	54.9	64.0	67.8	61.3
Mature Bulls	32.9	35.6	40.9	47.7	54.9	78.0

Adapted from Nutrient Requirements of Beef Cattle, seventh revised edition

BEEFRESEARCH.CA/NUTRITION

Your Voice Matters: Help Shape the Future of Cover Crops on the Prairies

Cover crop use on the Prairies continues to evolve, and a survey is launching to capture that change. A collaborative project led by researchers from the University of Manitoba and Manitoba Agriculture, alongside the Ontario Cover Crop Steering Committee, this initiative aims to **learn more about the adoption, practices, benefits, and challenges** of cover crops as reported by farmers.

The goal? To gain a deeper understanding of current cover crop dynamics - including motivations and limitations - and to inform future initiatives in **research, policy development, programming, and communications** related to cover crops.

In 2020, the same team gathered insights from over 1,300 farmers across Canada and released survey findings through Prairie and Ontario reports that helped shape conversations around cover crop usage. Now, five years later, they're back to keep a pulse on the ever-changing landscape of cover crop use.

This year's survey is open to **all farm types and sizes** across Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Ontario, and will be live from December 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026. It targets:

- Farms that **did** and **did not** grow cover crops during the **2025 growing season**
- Growers who **previously used cover crops** but have since stopped

By gathering insights directly from farmers, this survey contributes to a **deeper understanding of the evolving dynamics** of cover crop use in Prairie and Ontario agriculture.

Every participant will "take their own journey" through the questions depending on their responses, making it relevant to all levels of experience and farm types. Results will be reported at the provincial level, and **participation is completely anonymous**. Respondents can also choose to receive the final report.

SHARE YOUR FEEDBACK TODAY!

Share your perspective

For more information, please contact:

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Corrals for handling beef cattle

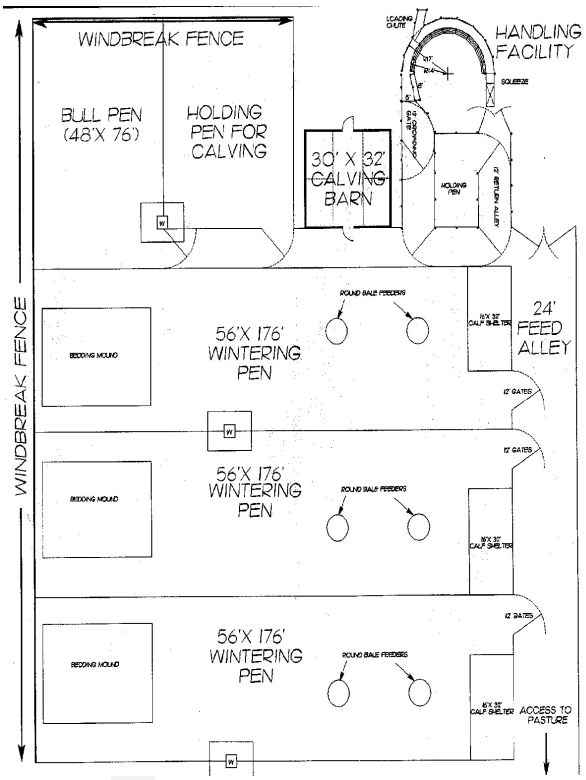
Well-designed cattle handling facilities make the work easier for the producer while handling the livestock in a safer and less stressful environment. The operation of any cattle facility depends on cattle behaviour, corral design, and the skill and technique of the handler.

Curved working chutes prevents animals from seeing the truck, squeeze chute, or people until they are almost at the end of the chute. This design takes advantage of an animal's natural circling behaviour. A catwalk on the inside of the chute will allow the handler to stand in the best position to move livestock safely and efficiently.

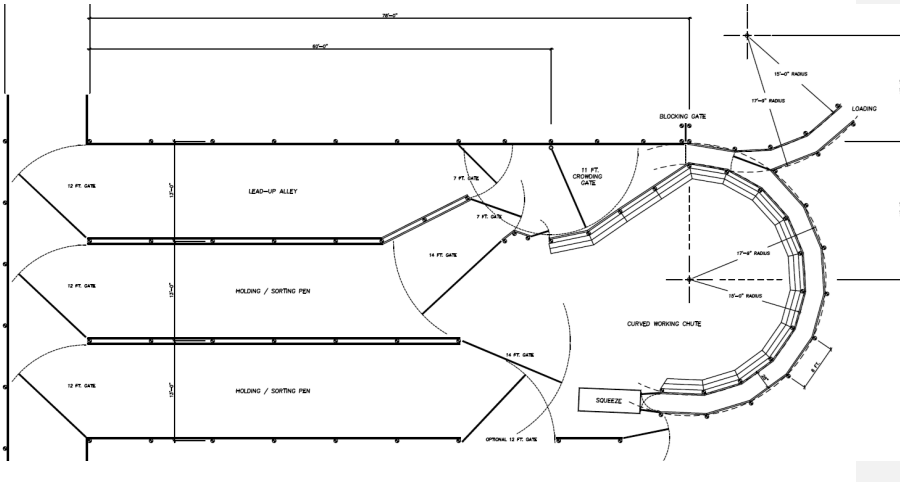
Cattle like to follow the leader and are motivated to maintain visual contact with each other. Uniform lighting is important as cattle avoid shadows and will balk at contrasting patterns, as well as moving or flapping objects. Use solid sides for crowding pens and chutes.

A livestock facility will be comprised of several components including collection alleys, sorting pens, holding pens, a crowding pen, working chute, squeeze and a loading chute. When handling facilities are well designed, the sorting, handling and treatment of the cattle will become much smoother and trouble free.

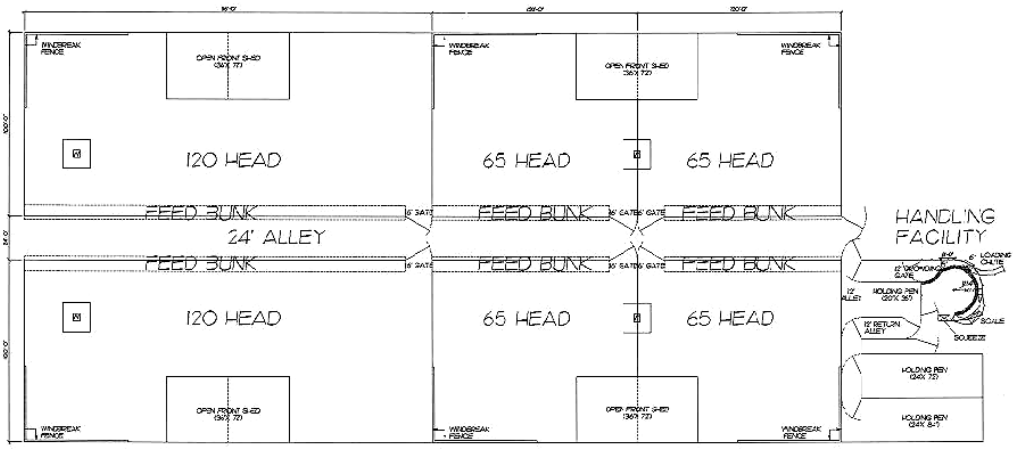
Cow-calf operating facility



Standard beef cattle working corral



Cattle backgrounding facility



Manitoba Beef & Forage Days

ERIKSDALE, AUSTIN & ROBLIN

Eriksdale

Date: Tuesday, January 13, 2026
Time: 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., supper to follow
Place: Eriksdale Community Centre, 21 Railway Ave., Eriksdale MB

Austin

Date: Wednesday, January 14, 2026
Time: 8:45 a.m. to 3:15 p.m.
Place: Austin Community Centre, 40 – 2nd Ave., Austin MB

Roblin

Date: Thursday, January 15, 2026
Time: 10:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Place: Roblin Community Centre, 55 6th Avenue N.E., Roblin MB

Agenda

Coffee and registration

Pasture Forage and Water Quality Results from 2024 & 2025
Livestock and Forage Specialist, Manitoba Agriculture

Cattle Market Update and Outlook for 2026
Rick Wright Cattle Consulting

The Grazing Advantage: Building Productive and Resilient Forage Systems
Christine O'Reilly – Forage and Grazing Specialist, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness

Beyond the Breeding Soundness Exam: Understanding Bull Subfertility in the Herd (Eriksdale Location)
Colin Palmer, DVM, Western College of Veterinary Medicine

And more!

For more information, contact Manitoba Agriculture

Eriksdale	1-844-769-6224 (please register in advance)
Roblin	1-844-769-6224 (please register in advance)
Portage	204-239-3353

If you would like to be added to our information-sharing list, please email or text Juanita Kopp (Juanita.Kopp@gov.mb.ca, 204-825-4302). Your input or topic ideas are always welcome.

Contact us

- Go to manitoba.ca/agriculture
- Email us at agriculture@gov.mb.ca
- Follow us on X @MBGovAg.
- Visit your local Manitoba Agriculture Service Office