

Feed requirements for beef cattle

Recovery after fire - February 2014

The table below provides a guide to the amount of hay livestock owners need to feed their beef cattle to maintain their weight.

Unless otherwise stated, the figures listed in the right hand side column of the table are for maintenance. An exception should be made for cows with calves, which will be losing weight because when a cow is in early lactation the total amount of energy she requires can be greater than her ability to consume enough energy from feed. At this time it is normal for cows to lose weight.

The quantity of hay in the table assumes all requirements are being met from hay and the hay is of reasonable quality (8.5 megajoules per kilogram of dry matter). A small square bale is approximately 25 kilograms, so in the table 8 kilograms is about one third of a small square bale.

Class of stock	Energy required each day (MJ ME)	Kilograms of hay per head per day (good quality) (no pasture being fed)
Cow (450 kg)* + calf (1-3 months)	90	12***
Dry cow (450 kg) middle-late pregnancy	65	9
Bulls (700 kg)	70	10
Early weaned calf (150 kg) < 6 mths, 0.25 kg/day wt. gain	30	4**
Weaner (250 kg) 6-12 mths, 0.25 kg/day wt. gain	40	5.5
Yearling (350 kg) 12-18 mths, maintenance	40	5.5
Steer (500 kg), maintenance	60	8

Table 1. A guide to the daily requirements of beef cattle

* British breed cows. Beef dairy cows can have 25-35% greater requirements. ** Crude protein level in diet may limit intake.

*** Performance on limit of maximum dry matter intake.

The hay required in *Table 1* assumes no pasture is being fed. Fresh pasture has a high energy content (11MJ/kg DM) and even a small amount of pasture can significantly reduce the amount of supplement required. For example, 4 kilograms of pasture dry matter per day would reduce the hay required for a cow and young calf in the above table by approximately 50 per cent.

Summary

For beef producers facing a feed shortage a range of options are available, but the earlier a decision is made the better (and usually the cheaper the outcome). Each farm situation is different and needs to be considered on its merits. For further information about livestock and or recovery after fire, please call DEPI on 136 186 or visit www.depi.vic.gov.au.