

Feeding and agisting livestock

Livestock producers in fire-affected regions are facing decisions about feeding or agisting stock while pasture recovers.

In deciding whether to feed stock on your own property, consider the class of the animal, the nutritional needs (energy, protein, fibre and water requirements) and the length of time required to feed. Don't forget – you will need to feed stock for at least 6 weeks after grass begins to recover and regrow, to allow it to be strong enough to withstand grazing.

AGISTMENT

When considering agistment, the quality and quantity of feed available is important as it will determine the class of stock and length of time it is suitable for. Also look at the water source – is it good quality and readily available? What will it cost you in dollars and time to regularly check the stock? What is the infrastructure like for feeding out if needed? Are the yards safe for handling stock? Is the fencing adequate? And if you go down the route of agistment, don't forget to record the animal movements on the NLIS database.

Agistment for cattle can cost anywhere between \$7 and \$25 per head per week.

THE COST OF FEEDING STOCK

Note: The following calculations assume hay has the following characteristics: 65% NDF (neutral detergent fibre), 10% CP (crude protein), 9 MJME/kgDM (megajoules of metabolisable energy/kilogram of dry matter) and 85% DM (dry matter).

And in the diets where pellets are used, they have the following characteristics (unless otherwise specified): 20% NDF, 12% CP, 12 MJME/kgDM, 90% DM.

A 550 kg **dry cow** can maintain her condition on reasonable quality hay and would require 8.6 kg of hay fed out to maintain her weight/condition. To provide this, if hay cost

- \$300/tonne, it would cost \$2.56/head/day or \$17.92/head/week
- \$400/tonne, it would cost \$3.41/head/day or \$23.87/head/week
- \$500/tonne, it would cost \$4.26/head/day or \$29.82/head/week

Young growing stock cannot consume enough hay to grow at 0.5 kg/day and would need the addition of pellets in the diet. A **350 kg LW young steer/heifer growing at 0.5 kg/day** would require a mix of 90% hay and 10% pellets based on energy requirements, which would be 7.3 kg of hay fed out, and 0.8 kg of pellets fed out. To provide this, it would cost

- Hay \$300/t, pellets \$600/t – it would cost \$2.66/head/day or \$18.62/head/week
- Hay \$400/t, pellets \$600/t – it would cost \$3.39/head/day or \$23.73/head/week
- Hay \$500/t, pellets \$600/t – it would cost \$4.12/head/day or \$28.84/head/week
- Hay \$500/t, pellets \$800/t – it would cost \$4.27/head/day or \$29.89/head/week

Cows with 4-month-old calves. This class of cattle have high energy requirements so need a combination of hay and pellets in their diet. Using the hay and pellets above, they would require a diet of 60% hay and 40% pellets based on energy requirements, which works out at 9.7 kg of hay and 6.1 kg of pellets fed out. To provide this, it would cost

- Hay \$300/t, pellets \$600/t – it would cost \$6.54/cow calf unit/day or \$45.78/week
- Hay \$500/t, pellets \$800/t – it would cost \$9.69/cow calf unit/day or \$67.83/week

If you have this class of cattle, **consider early weaning** the calves and either feeding the calves and cows separately or

sending the cows off on agistment depending on the availability and price of hay and agistment.

After early weaning the calves, the cows are classed as dry cows. Feed them the **dry cow** ration of hay only, mentioned earlier.

These early weaned calves have a slightly higher protein requirement than all previously mentioned cattle, so will require a higher protein pellet than has been used in previous examples. In this example we are using a pellet with the following characteristics: 20% NDF, **14% CP**, 12 MJME/kgDM, 90% DM.

For early-weaned calves growing at 1 kgLW/day (roughly 120 kgLW at 4 months old) they will require a diet of 40% hay, 60% pellets based on energy requirements which equates to 1.6 kg of hay and 2.3 kg of pellets fed out. To provide this it would cost

- Hay \$500/t, pellets \$800/t – it would cost \$2.68/head/day or \$18.76/head/week

Compare the costs of early weaning versus keeping the calves on the cows (cows with calves at foot), where hay is \$500/t and pellets \$800/t

Cows with calves at foot:

- \$9.69/cow calf unit/day or \$67.83/cow calf unit/week

Early weaned calves fed separately to dry cows

- Dry cows (hay only diet) \$4.26/head/day or \$29.82/head/week
- Calves \$2.68/head/day or \$18.76/head/week
- Total \$6.94/head/day or \$48.58/head/week

By early weaning, and feeding both mobs separately, there is a **saving** of (\$9.69 - \$6.94) **\$2.75/head/day** or (\$67.83 - \$48.58) **\$19.25/head/week**

For a mob of 100 cows and 100 calves, this would be a saving of **\$1,925 per week**. Although if feeding long term, the ration for the early weaned calves would need to be increased as they gained weight. By the end of month three of feeding (now roughly 7 months old and 210 kgLW), they would require 3.2kg hay and 3kg pellets fed out, where hay

and pellet price hasn't change, it would cost \$4.02/head/day or \$28.14/head/week (plus the dry cows). If you were feeding cows with 7 month calves at foot, their ration would cost \$76.30/cow calf unit/week

At this stage the savings would be \$18.34/head/week or for a mob of 100 cows and 100 calves, you would be saving **\$1,834 per week** by feeding the cows separately to the calves.

As an average, over a 12-week feeding period, feeding the cows separately to the calves could **save \$22,554 in feed costs**, compared to feeding them as cow/calf units.

¹ Full details of Victoria's off-label use framework can be found on the Agriculture Victoria website at <http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/farm-management/chemicals/off-label-chemical-use>. Each State and Territory has its own off-label use framework and beekeepers need to ensure they are complying with the correct jurisdictions' requirements at the time of use.

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