

Come Grow with Us!

Jonael Bosques, Agriculture Agent • UF/FAS Extension Hardee County • jonael@ufl.edu

Making sure the herd is well nourished

Nutrition is the highest expense on any livestock operation. When talking about cattle and other ruminants (sheep, goats, etc.) the feed bill is reduced because these livestock species can harvest nutrients from forage in its vegetative stage. Often times the problem we run into is the fact that there is a group of animals that gets enough to meet their metabolic demands while another group is not. For example, Bahiagrass forage can meet a mature animals protein needs but not the ones of a growing calf. How do we make sure that our growing steers and heifers are getting enough nutrients from the feed and forage they have access to on a daily basis?

Introducing the Numbers

The National Research Council (NRC) has developed a table that depicts the needs for specific groups of cattle based on weight. You can find this table 3-6 [here](#). Steer and heifer requirements can be found in table 2 [here](#).

These tables specify the needs for dry matter intake, total digestible nutrient needs per day, net energy needs, crude protein needs, calcium and phosphorus needs.

Now what?

Step 1. Know the nutrient requirements for your particular group of animals. This is why we separate animals by age group and metabolic stage. Young heifers should be grouped separately from older cows because each group will need different rations.

Review and estimate your group's weight based on the tables above.

Step 2. Know the composition of your feed. Ideally we would recommend that you analyze the feed through a certified feed laboratory in order to get

a precise value on each batch. It is important to highlight the great variability in nutrient content since it will depend on when the material was harvested and how it was treated before harvest/process.



Figure 1. Providing a balanced ration which meets the metabolic needs of our herd needs to be the priority of every livestock producer. Photo credit: Jonael Bosques, UF/IFAS Extension Hardee County.

You can use the services provided by our laboratories to estimate the nutrient value of your feed by testing them (Call our office for more information and cost). If you are interested in an approximation, you can use the 2016 Feed Composition Tables provided [here](#) to estimate your ration.

Step 3. Contact your Extension Agent to review and help you formulate a diet for your herd. Feed companies also have animal nutritionists that can help you get this done. If you want to learn how to do it, we encourage you to work with a professional until you get the fundamentals on how to estimate your feed formulation's value. You can use these online tools to do that as well as to reformulate a ration: 1. Noble

Continues on the next page...

Foundation's online Pearson Square calculator access it [here](#) for your computer. 2. For your smartphone: Drought Feed Calculator smartphone app access it [here](#).

If you are a pen and paper kind of person or you would be interested in more information and fundamentals on how to fine-tune your feed formulation you can access this Colorado Extension factsheet number 1.618 by clicking [here](#).

Be Informed

Informed decisions can result in better outcomes. These online tools and information can get you there. When it comes to animal nutrition, it pays to know what is going in our cow's bellies. Is it meeting their nutritional demands, and what to do if it is not? If you would like to learn more on how to formulate the rations on your livestock operation, please call us at the UF/IFAS Extension Hardee County office at 863-773-2164. We are here to help.

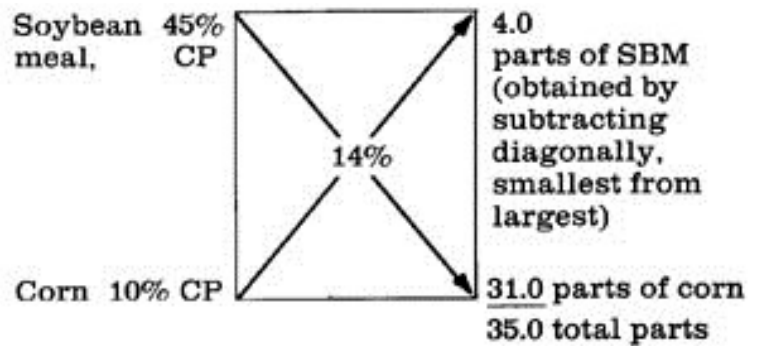


Figure 2. Pearson square. Simple equations used to balance rations for a specific nutrient. Image courtesy of Colorado State Extension.

Like us on Facebook!

