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It is amazing how different the years can be, last year I had some of my Christmas stuff done in September. Here it is ten days before Christmas, and I have not started! As the temperature drops outside, so could a cow's health. While cattle producers may not be able to eliminate all of the stress that winter places on their herds, research shows that there is a significant correlation between feed efficiency and feeding-site selection.

The thermos neutral zone for healthy cattle is 23 to 77 degrees F. When the temperature outside falls below or rises above the animal's comfort zone, the body needs to produce more energy to keep the animal cool or warm. When this happens, cattle need to receive enough nutrition to help keep them healthy and in good condition. It is also important that feeding sites be placed in well-drained areas to reduce water, mud and manure buildup.

A buildup of water could not only waste portions of hay bales, but could also decrease the nutritional value of the hay, creating a need for more supplementation.

Excessive mud and manure around feeding sites also means the cattle will have to exert more energy to reach their feed. Hmm, maybe the plate of Christmas cookies should be placed on the treadmill?

To prevent waste buildup, producers should rotate ring feeders before adding new bales of hay. One feeding site can feed approximately 15 to 20 head, depending on the availability of other feed.

Winter storage areas for hay are also something to think about, rows of bales should line up north to south, about 2 to 3 feet apart, so that sunlight will reach a greater surface area, and snow will not accumulate on the top of the bales.

This will help evaporate moisture from the bales and the ground around them more quickly.

Tightly wrapped hay bales will absorb less water than loosely wrapped bales.

Of course, we also advocate testing your forages, so you know exactly what nutrients it provides.

We have hay-testing equipment that we loan out so you can get this done!