

Several opportunities exist for the producer that didn't exist five years ago to improve efficiency of feeding. Technological advances on the forage processor have made possible precision chopping and blending of forages and grain to deliver the lowest cost ration while meeting all nutritional requirements and doing so quicker than mix wagons. When balancing a ration with the various computer programs available they frequently combine hay, straw and grain as the most economical combination to meet the needs of a specific animal in a specified environment. The challenge for the producer is how to prepare and deliver this ration blended in an accurate and time effective way. With the introduction of the Highline CFR1251 this is now possible and cost effective as well. The CFR 1251 has a dual chamber each with individual aggression settings allowing several hay/straw combinations. The grain tank can insert grain into the forage stream so that it is completely homogenized with the forages. It is the chopper blades that homogenize the diet saving the grain and small particles from loss and preventing sorting by the animals. Some producers are using a mix wagon but its ability to blend and chop forages quickly is not equal to the CFR line of forage processors.

Straw is most often priced lower than hay and combining hay with straw lowers the daily cost of feeding the gestating and lactating cow. Other crop residues also can serve as a good source of energy. One owner of a CFR1251 fed his cows all winter using a 50/50 mix of greenfeed or hay blended with barley straw and barley grain. These 1800 pound cows in lactation ate 18 pounds of straw plus 18 pounds of hay plus 12 pounds of grain perfectly blended and chopped every day during the month pre-calving and the two subsequent months post-calving. Historically these cows ate free choice long hay pre and post calving. This producer reduced his feeding cost more than \$50 per cow over the 2016-2017 winter feeding period of 190 days using the blending capabilities of the CFR 1251. Calving in January put additional pressure on his feeding program but the blended hay and straw diet supported a 93% pregnant rate in his cows at rebreeding time. The CFR 1251 can chop and blend two 1900 pound bales of forage and blend in grain in under 5 minutes which made feeding his herd a quick process. Precisely feeding the daily requirement for each animal does not allow those animals with a high residual feed intake to eat more than they need. This producer had installed the scale option to improve his accuracy in daily feeding. Another helpful aspect of this model is that by changing the aggression settings a specific hay to straw blend can be dialed up thereby adjusting the ratio of hay to straw. Using this

feature we can feed backgrounders, heifers and cows differently according to their needs. This helps to keep daily feed cost for the herd under control. In simple terms there are two main divisions of cost in evaluating a beef herd. The one that receives a lot of attention is feed utilization, and rightly so. This can be generally 30% to 35% of total cost. It is important to see that this means 65% to 70% is not feed associated and also has to be examined very carefully. An indication that the farm is properly balanced financially is to have an operating expense ratio of 65% or less. The operating expense ratio is a measure of what it costs to operate your farm compared to the income it generates. The operating expense ratio is calculated by dividing the farm operating expense by its gross operating income. Using this number lets you compare your farm performance to similar sized operations. Any figure over 65 % is a red flag. Adding a forage processor to your equipment list adds very little to the expense side and bring a return to the investment adding to the income side. If the operating expense ratio is out of line examine costs including those of intermediate and long term assets and compare to industry standards to find and fix any areas of over expenditure. The long term financial health of your farm depends on you monitoring and managing expenditures to bring them into line with industry standards. Care and attention here ensures 65% of the cost of operating is under control. The emphasis is on controlling cost in advance, not cutting cost after the fact.

The future for feeding ruminant animals can be more profitable for you by blending forages and grain for precision feeding using the CFR1251 or a suitable model for your farm.

Summary:

- Technology has advanced to the point where the Highline forage processor delivers accurate cutting and blending of forages reducing winter feeding costs.
  - Financial stability comes from monitoring costs and strategically employing technology that gives a good return to investment.
  - A Cost of Production worksheet can be found using this link  
[https://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/business-and-economics/financial-management/pubs/cop\\_beef\\_cowcalf.pdf](https://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/business-and-economics/financial-management/pubs/cop_beef_cowcalf.pdf)
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