

KENTUCKY BEEF NETWORK

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Kentucky beef cattle producers have a wonderful resource available to show them best management practices for their farm.



The “Cadillac” of cattle feeders has a roof to keep rain off the hay and a textured concrete pad that prevents cattle from slipping and injuring themselves.

Farmers have to be flexible and resourceful to deal with unpredictable weather, disease, fluctuating feed and water costs and meat prices, which are challenges that farmers face daily. In Kentucky, there is a resource available specifically for cattle farmers to learn best management practices that make their jobs easier and more profitable. That resource is Eden Shale Farm in Owenton.

In 1955, Eden Shale Farm was established as a research farm for the University of Kentucky. The 961-acre farm is now managed and operated by the Kentucky Beef Network, LLC (KBN). Since 2013, KBN has provided on-farm support, education and resources to Kentucky’s 38,000 beef cattle producers. Eden Shale is a working cattle farm whose purpose is to be similar to the farms of average cattle producers having a commercial herd of cross breeds.

Dan Miller, KBN Industry Coordinator; Becky Thompson, the executive director of KBN; and Dr. Steve Higgins, from the University of Kentucky, work together to realize common concerns and identify solutions.

Becky Thompson, said, “As soon as farmers walk onto the farm, their jaws drop because Eden Shale looks just like their farm. With our steep hills and shale soil, farmers know that if we can get something to work here, they can make it work on their farm.”

Eden Shale Farm faces the same challenges as other farms and seeks the best ways to deal with those issues. One issue deals with the way hay is fed to the cattle. When hay is placed on the ground for cattle to eat, the loss per round bale is 58 percent. This waste is costly to the farmer, and the hay mixes with dirt or muck, which worsens in the winter. Ensuring cattle

Key to Success

Be open to new ideas,
and use Best Management
Practices for
optimal results.

have access to hay that is free of dirt and muck helps them stay healthier.

Dr. Higgins provided ideas to Eden Shale Farm for various types of fence-line feeders with a pad that would minimize the loss of hay and be more profitable to the farmer in the long run. Since the Kentucky Beef Network is a member of KY EXCEL Farm, the Commonwealth's voluntary environmental leadership program, KBN decided that its 2016 membership project would be to install five different feeders with pads to demonstrate multiple ways to feed cattle.

Farmers are able to adapt any

of the models to suit their farm's needs and budget. Each of the five feeders with pads installed at Eden Shale Farm holds two round bales of hay and vary in cost.

"As far as cost goes, these feeders and pads go from the Cadillac version down to the moped model," Dr. Higgins explained.

The styles, one with a textured concrete pad and a roof over the feeding area down to an open circular metal feeder, not only vary in price, but Miller explained that "they also allow farmers to compare and contrast the functionality of each feeder."

Using a feeder with a pad is a best management practice that keeps the cattle's food clean, makes it easier to manage, saves money on hay and improves the health of the herd. Hay loss can be as little as 20 percent by using a feeder and pad.

With winter's cold, rain, snow and ice, the pads are vital to reduce muck. These pads can be made of textured concrete around the feeder to prevent the cattle from slipping. Gravel or a geotextile mesh or fabric may also be used to reduce the muck. Without a pad of some kind, a build-up of muck may cause cattle to waste additional energy trying to obtain food, become leaner and unable to store as much fat or contract a hoof disease from standing or walking in the muck. In winter, it is also important to locate the feeders near trees that are a windbreak for the cattle since it takes energy to stay warm.

Thompson noted that for any farmers who are interested in visiting Eden Shale Farm to learn about best management practices, there are free workshops throughout the year to help farmers work smarter, not harder. Visit <http://www.edenshalefarm.com/about.html> for dates of future workshops.



A textured concrete pad around a feeder



A feeder with a gravel pad