NEWSLETTER

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Please contact your local extension office for the print version of any article included in this newsletter.

Here's your November Driftless Ag Update!

Hello and congratulations on receiving our November Driftless Ag Update! This newsletter is co-written by your local UW-Madison Extension Ag Educators, Beth McIlquham (livestock) and Sam Bibby (crops).

Notes from your Regional Crops Educator- Sam Bibby

- Winterization Reminder! This is your reminder to drain those pumps on the sprayer, bring that pressure washer inside, and shut off the frost-sensitive hydrant/waterer. RV antifreeze (propylene glycol) is a great non-toxic product to flush and fill sprayer pumps with. It will also keep seals from drying out. Consider blowing out sprayer lines with air pressure to remove water first.

-Johnson Grass is an increasing weed issue in Western WI. Considered one of the worst weeds around the world it is something to be on the lookout for. Johnson grass is a perennial warm season grass and has developed resistance to multiple herbicide modes of action in different areas around the US. I have found several populations of Johnson grass in Vernon and La Crosse counties. I am in the process of digging roots and collecting seeds. It is our current hypothesis that it is not able to overwinter here and is only causing problems as an annual weed. If you know of a population, please contact me so we can look for root structures indicating a perennial plant and collect seed for a herbicide resistance screening.

-Selling or Buying High Moisture Corn? This tool developed by UW-Madison Extension Educator Kevin Jarek is a calculator developed to help find a fair price for high moisture corn. It takes into account the current price of LP, electricity and the standard shrink factor.

Notes from your Regional Livestock Educator- Beth McIlquham

-Beef Quality Assurance (BQA): In-person BQA trainings are schedule for the end of 2025 and early 2026.

-Fall 2025 Cattle Feeder Projections Now Available: With cattle prices at all-time highs, forward-thinking cattle feeders and backgrounders will be doing some calculations to determine what they can pay for feeder calves, and/or what they should forward contract them for. To assist with this task UW-Madison Division of Extension has assembled a set of projections using initial purchase prices for feeders calves derived from late September 2025 Wisconsin feeder calf sale reports.

-Disease Digest: The UW-Madison Extension Livestock team has created a webpage that houses resources and information on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. HPAI H5N1 was confirmed in a backyard poultry flock in Racine County in October. There have been no cases of New World Screwworm in the U.S. in livestock. A horse tested positive for Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) in Marathon County. For animal owners of all kinds, please evalutate your biosecurity protocols, including pest management.

Badger Crop Connect

Badger Crop Connect 2025

Badger Crop Connect is back for 2025. Every 2nd and 4th Thursday from 12:30 to 1:30 via Zoom UW faculty and other topic experts will provide timely recommendations, share research findings and provide program updates.

https://cropsandsoils.extension.wisc.edu/programs/badger-crop-connect/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=wcm_march_ii

Virtual Farm Succession Workshop Series- Sign Up Now

Navigate complex farm succession conversations with confidence!

The "Cultivating Your Farm's Future" workshop series covers essential topics like communication preferences, common tensions around farm succession, inheritance distributions (Is "equal" fair?), financials for farm succession, estate planning (probate, estate tax), wills, trusts, and business entities. Even if you've attended other classes, this program focuses on helping you get a START on YOUR succession plan.

The program fee is $150/per farm, allowing multiple family members to attend. Act quickly! The registration deadline for the fall series is October 24, 2025.

Sign up now: go.wisc.edu/cyff

Save a Calf, Save a Cow Workshop

This workshop is for beef, dairy, and their workers. This workshop provides information and techniques to boost your confidence in preparing the cow for calving, obstetric techniques and newborn calf care. Cost is $20. Find more information and registration by clicking on the picture above or the button below. With any other questions, please contact Beth McIlquham (contact information listed at the bottom of the newsletter).

h***ttps://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfAcluOmVLn2uy5j5995WNgt9Iund5XzBi-YqO-6N8qvZfoEA/viewform***

Register for WWASH- Dec 16-17

Join us at the 2025 WWASH Conference to explore the intersection of on-farm research, soil health, and water quality. Engage with other farmers, dynamic keynote speakers, participate in interactive breakout sessions, and contribute to thought-provoking roundtable discussions, all designed to deepen your expertise and provide actionable insights for your farm or the producers you support.

https://cropsandsoils.extension.wisc.edu/wwash/

Small Business Workshop: Rotational Grazing

Nov 6th, 5:00pm-6:30pm -Gays Mills Community Center

Join us for an inspiring talk with Crawford County Custom Grazer and WI Farmers Union member Joseph Childs.

No Registration, Just Show Up!

Healthcare and Childcare on the Farm. Workshop in Prairie du Chein on November 14th. Register by Nov 3rd.

The Health Care session will help participants connect health care needs and insurance to farm and family well-being, manage health insurance as part of farm risk, explore insurance options, and budget for insurance costs. The Child Care session will help participants navigate the impact of childcare on farm life, integrate child care into farm risk management, design family-friendly farm enterprises, and budget for child care costs

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdI7c9AJK4T_tFcQB6w1zD4zHKUjiMKPi4Va4JI16bHqDfxrQ/viewform

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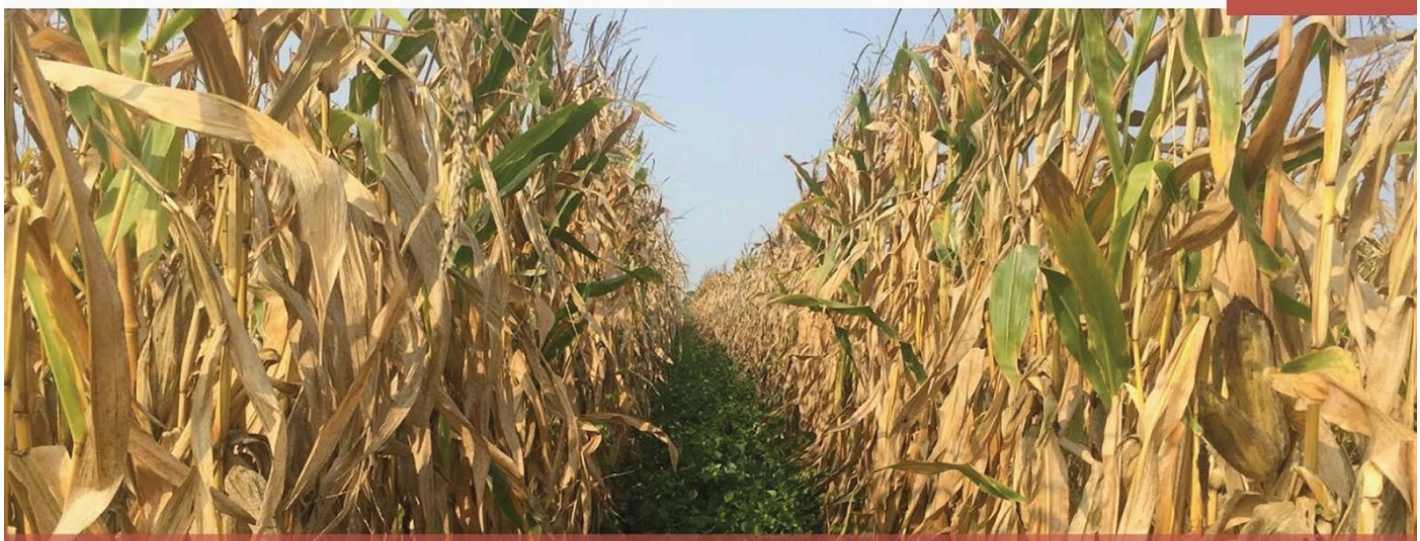

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT PHOSPHORUS STRATIFICATION IN SOIL HEALTH SYSTEMS

Extension's Agriculture Water Quality Program is looking for high quality on-farm data to help improve our understanding on how soil health practices impact soil phosphorus stratification. Questions still exist on if cover crops, and their impact on soil biology, structure, and nutrient cycling, exacerbate or alleviate phosphorus stratification. Our program seeks to explore this relationship and hopes to answer "Do long term no till + cover crops sites have similar levels of stratified P as long term no-till sites? How uniformly does P stratification exist in no-till fields?". Fields of interest include those with high soil test phosphorus values and those utilizing soil health practices (reduced tillage, cover crops, manure) for varied lengths of time.

WHY COLLABORATE

Learn About Soil Fertility Distribution

Individual participants will gain awareness of their soil nutrient stratification.

Scientific Contribution

Your contribution to this work will aid in an understanding of phosphorus stratification and what relationships occur across different landscapes and within different soil health management systems.

Minimize Risk

Groups will learn about aggregated local results and recommendations for minimizing nutrient loss.

Contact Sheri Schwert at sheri.schwert@wisc.edu for more information or to participate

Plan Ahead for a Successful Winter-feeding Season

Winter is just around the corner, and so is winter feeding season for the beef cow herd. Now is the time to evaluate your forage inventory and compare it with the herd's expected feed needs. Planning ahead can pay off in both the short and long term. If additional feed is needed, acting early provides more time to explore options, compare prices, and secure quality feed, rather than settling for last-minute purchases. Looking further ahead, ensuring the herd's nutritional needs are met throughout the winter supports body condition, calving success, and rebreeding performance. This preparation increases the likelihood of stronger calf crops, improved herd performance, and greater profitability in the year to come.

Ideally, mature cows should maintain a BCS of 5 to 6. Mismanagement can result in cows that are either too thin or over-conditioned, both of which carry economic consequences. Thin cows are more likely to experience poor reproductive performance and reduced milk production, while over-conditioned cows face higher feed costs, increased risk of mobility issues, and a greater likelihood of dystocia. Table 1 highlights the impact of BCS on reproductive performance and revenue potential, using representative feeder calf sale prices from late summer 2025 in Wisconsin.

Table 1. Relationship of body condition score (BCS) to beef cow performance and income.

BCS	3	4	5	6
Pregnancy rate, %	43	61	86	93
Calving interval, days	414	381	364	364
Calf average daily gain, lbs/day	1.6	1.75	1.85	1.85
Calf weaning weight, lbs	374	460	514	514
Calf price, $/cwt*	420	410	400	400
Revenue/cow exposed, $**	675	1,150	1,768	1,912

Adapted from Kunkle et al.

*Late July 2025 representative Wisconsin feeder calf sale prices.

**Income per calf x pregnancy rate

The first step in developing a winter-feeding plan is to take inventory of the forages and feeds on hand. This inventory should include the quantity (how much is available) and the quality (nutritional value) of each lot. Ideally, forages should be stored and identified by cutting, harvest field, and other factors that may influence feed value. Elements such as crop maturity at harvest, weather conditions during harvest, and species composition can all affect forage quality. Sampling and laboratory testing of each lot provide the information needed to optimize their use in meeting herd requirements. Relying on visual appraisal alone can be misleading and may result in poor feed allocation decisions.

Quantity is best documented by weight, which can be estimated with reasonable accuracy by weighing a truck or wagon load of representative bales from each lot and then multiplying by the total bale count. Average bale weight is often quite different than what we assume, so this step is important. For silage piles or bags, weighing several loads and recording the number of loads hauled can provide a sound estimate if weighing every load is not practical. Alternatively, silage quantities in bags, piles, or bunkers can be estimated using measurements and density values – the more precise the input data, the more accurate the estimate. Finally, remember to account for storage losses (shrink) when determining available forage (Table 2).

Table 2. Big bale storage loss by storage method.

Storage type	Range of dry matter loss (%)
Under roof	2 to 10
Plastic wrap, on ground	4 to 7
Bale sleeve, on ground	4 to 8
Covered, rock pad or elevated	2 to 17
Uncovered, rock pad or elevated	3 to 46
Uncovered, on ground, net wrap	6 to 25
Covered, on ground	4 to 46
Uncovered, on ground	5 to 61

Saxe

The second step is to determine the needs of the herd. A reputable animal nutritionist can be helpful with this process if a farmer does not have experience in this area. This involves formulating rations based on available forages to meet the herd's nutritional needs. Production groups and their specific needs throughout the winter need to be considered. In the case of a cow-calf operation, this should include the mature cow group, young cows (2- and 3-year-olds), and replacement heifers. Replacement heifers include those set to calve in the coming spring, and those retained from the recently weaned calf crop. Farmers should not forget about the bulls. Some farms may also be backgrounding or finishing out additional calves. Each group will have different needs, and those needs will change throughout the year. For example, bred cows and heifers' nutritional needs will increase once they enter the third trimester of pregnancy. Shortchanging them at that time can have negative impacts on their colostrum quality, milk production, and their calf's health and vigor. Body condition score of each group needs to be considered when formulating rations to address any need to add, or in some cases reduce, condition.

Potential forage shortages or excesses can be estimated at this stage, along with supplement needs. Feeding losses should be accounted for here (Table 3), while storage losses should have already been considered during the inventory step. Many farmers also build in a cushion or surplus to prepare for longer winters or unexpected situations where extra feed may be needed. The amount of cushion varies by farm, but a minimum of 45 to 60 days is often a reasonable guideline for contingency planning. Some farmers prefer to maintain an even larger reserve to guard against weather-related shortages. Once forage needs and reserves are determined, a "shopping list" can be created while there is still time to compare options and secure feed at better prices.

Putting the winter-feeding plan in writing or into a computer program improves both accuracy and implementation. University of Wisconsin-Extension offers a forage and feed inventory and usage estimating spreadsheet that can be a valuable tool in this process. The spreadsheet includes sections for estimating inventory, with tabs for silage stored in bags, piles, bunkers, and upright silos, as well as baled forages. While it does not balance rations, it does allow users to allocate forage from the inventory to different livestock groups on the farm, making it possible to estimate feed use, identify potential shortages or surpluses, and plan accordingly for the season. The spreadsheet is available here: ***https://livestock.extension.wisc.edu/decision-tools-and-software/#Feed-Inventory***. Whether using paper and pencil or a digital tool, planning ahead and maintaining an accurate inventory provides more flexibility to improve herd management and performance, ultimately supporting long-term profitability.

Adding weight to market cows may add value

Sales of market (cull) cows make up approximately 20 percent of the gross revenue of beef cow calf operations. Not all market cows are only destined to become ground beef. Prices for market cows reflect the amount and value of retail product a cow is estimated to yield. Those with a body condition score (BCS) of upper 5 or higher will have some whole muscle cuts removed as they are able to meet quality demands for use in retail and restaurant markets. Research has shown that market cows with a BCS 6 maximize the total sellable product.

Several criteria should be considered when deciding if adding weight and condition to market cows makes sense. These criteria include available space and resources at the farm, the initial condition of the cows, current prices and spreads, cost of gain, and potential price seasonality at the expected time of sale. The answer may vary from year to year or season to season.

For optimal performance, cows will need to be clean, dry, and out of the wind. Besides feed, operators need to consider if they have sufficient housing, labor, and resources available for this to be achieved. It is important to account for the non-feed costs associated with owning them.

What do your market cows look like? When evaluating potential to add value, cow condition and health need to be considered. Young (aged 3 or younger), healthy, thinner cows will usually perform best from a gain and feed efficiency standpoint. Thin healthy cows, ages 4 to 8 years old, tend to not perform quite as well as younger cows, but are still candidates for consideration. Extra precautions should be taken with cows older than 8 years of age as this is when they tend to begin to decline and lose efficiency. Reasonable judgement should be taken to avoid higher risk cows, such as those that are very old, have obvious health complications, or those that are rapidly declining condition. If purchasing thin cows to add condition to, take into consideration biosecurity risks for the herd.

Research has shown that cull cow gain and feed efficiency can vary. Cows will not be as efficient as steers and heifers. When feeding a high energy ration to thin cows (BCS 2 to 4) to an end point BCS of upper 5 to 6, a reasonable daily gain estimate is 2.5 to 3 pounds per day. A feed efficiency estimate of those same animals is around 10 pounds of dry matter to 1 pound of liveweight gain. At these estimates it takes 30 to 90 days, depending on how thin they are to begin with, to increase the BCS 1 to 3 points on these cows.

Prices and cost influence the bottom line. Premiums and discounts are not static. Using a BCS score of 5 as a base, or par price, market analysis research has shown that cattle with BCS 2 to 4 were discounted greater than premiums paid for cows with BCS 6 to 8. It may not pay to feed beyond a BCS of upper 5 to 6 to a BCS of 7 or greater due to generally smaller premiums paid relative to BCS 5-6 prices and increased cost of gain due to decreased feed efficiency beyond BCS 6. Price seasonality is also a consideration. Seasonality of market cow prices has been fairly consistent with lower prices later in the fall due to timing with the highest numbers of cull cows being marketed as spring calving herds wean and sort. Prices typically trend back higher going into the new year and through the summer. It is unknown how current historically-low cow numbers may impact seasonality. For spring calving herds, feeding the thin cows for 60 to 90 days would tend to have them marketed early the next year when prices tend to increase. Feeding to sell during the seasonal fall low may not pencil out.

Evaluate your market cows, market conditions, potential costs of gain, and your resources on the farm. There may be an opportunity to increase revenue by putting condition on thin market cows before taking them to market.

Healthy Soil, Happy Soybeans: Insights from Multi-State Research

This multi-state study examined long-term agricultural trials across the U.S. to assess how management practices affect soil health and soybean yield. Researchers analyzed soil samples from 21 trials (4–50 years old) and modeled yield outcomes using data from 17 of those trials. Key findings showed that cover crops significantly improved soil health indicators such as mineralizable carbon and water-extractable organic carbon, while artificial drainage had no measurable impact. Soil organic carbon (SOC) and soil protein (ACE-N) were strongly linked to higher soybean yields, along with soil test potassium (STK) and geographic location (longitude). The study emphasizes that while seasonal management decisions influence immediate outcomes, long-term monitoring of soil carbon and nitrogen is essential for sustaining soil health and achieving consistent, high yields.

In a bean pod

- Fields with cover crops had greater mineralizable carbon (Min-C) and water-extractable organic carbon (WEOC) than no cover crop.
- Artificial drainage was not associated with changes in soil health parameters.
- The soil health parameters, soil organic carbon (SOC) and soil protein (ACE-N), were associated with soybean yield.
- Longitude and soil test potassium (STK) also influenced soybean yield.
- Monitoring soil carbon and nitrogen pools helps to sustain soil health and supports smarter decisions for higher, more consistent soybean yields.

For more information please see the full Extension document linked here: Healthy Soil, Happy Soybeans: Insights from Multi-State Research

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