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Newsletter

Management and nutrition
tips for beef producers

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Raising quality cattle is in their genes

Focusing on genetics helps the Crews family achieve their vision to produce superior Angus cattle that are productive, profitable and sustainable for cow/calf producers.

Raising Angus cattle runs in the genes of the Crews family.

Harry A. Crews established Stoney Point Farm in Buckingham County, Virginia, in 1929. Now, four generations, a few different breeds and a farm name change later, Crews Family Farms is known for raising high-quality Angus cattle.

A timeless tradition

Reflecting on the journey to where they are now, Jim Crews, third-generation, remembers when the herd was not just black cattle.

While Jim's grandfather, Harry, started the farm with Angus cattle, he later transitioned to registered Herefords. Then, Jim's dad, Dabney, took over Stoney Point Farm's Hereford cattle in the 1980s. "Black baldy feeder calves were in high demand," Jim shares. "Dad started crossing the herd with an Angus bull and selling the black baldy feeder calves at the Buckingham Cattlemen's Association Feeder Calf Sale."



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Dabney was also keeping replacement heifers every year. “Eventually, the females in the herd were pretty much all black,” Jim describes.

2013 brought the next major change when Jim and his son, J.D., purchased six registered black Angus heifers. Now, ten years later, their entire herd is registered Angus cattle.

A true family farm

Crews Family Farms has become a genuine family effort, with each family member playing a pivotal role.

J.D., fourth-generation, returned to the farm after graduating from Virginia Tech in 2018 to manage Crews Family Farms full-time. He and his wife, Bailey, manage the farm’s approximately 250 registered Angus females, including health and nutrition, breeding selection and record keeping.

Jim assists with forage production, A.I. breeding and the financial side of the operation, while his wife, Jill, heads up the sales and marketing side of the business.

Proven genetics

An intensive A.I. breeding program supports the farm’s vision of being a leading Angus breeder, developing superior Angus seedstock that will be productive, profitable and sustainable for cow/calf producers. A.I. allows them to select sires based on genetics and performance.



The farm has an average A.I. conception rate of 70% and an overall conception rate of 90%. “We have experimented with a limited amount of flushing and embryo transfer. Our goal is to incorporate more embryo transfers in our breeding program in the future,” says Jim.

Sires chosen are from lines of Angus genetics with pedigrees multiple generations deep with some of the best names in the Angus breed. They look for proven industry leaders for calving ease, performance, end carcass merit and maternal advantage.

Maternal value

Longevity strongly impacts the profitability of a cow/calf operation.

“We have cows in our herd that are over ten years old. They have maintained structural soundness, good body condition, high fertility rates and performance,” says J.D. “They’ve weaned a calf within 365-day intervals since age two.”

The Crews family firmly believes that success and profitability start with the foundation of the cow. Their selection criteria leans strongly on maternal genetics. High on their must-have list are maternal calving ease, high fertility rates, strong maternal instinct, teat and udder quality and superior milking ability.

They strive to produce moderately framed cattle with good fleshing ability, structural soundness, maternal value and the ability to perform well on average-quality fescue-based forage.

Focus on fescue

Fescue is the predominant forage in Virginia pastures. Due to the challenges that fescue containing endophyte can cause in cattle, the Crews had to make some management adjustments.

At first, they had both spring-calving and fall-calving cows. They noticed that the fescue forage was having more of a negative impact on the spring-calving cows, so they switched the entire herd to calve in the fall.

“The spring-calving cows were on fescue during the summer,” says Jim. “They were lactating, getting pulled down by calves, and the fescue just seemed to have a negative impact on that herd.”

“Conception rates weren’t as good with the spring herd,” adds J.D. “The spring calves performed better, but it was just hard on the cows.”

Another challenge that can pop up with fescue pastures is grass tetany. “We feed Purina® Wind and Rain® Hi-Mag mineral year-round to address it,” shares J.D.

Time for a change

They didn’t always feed Purina. Jim will never forget the final year they used another brand of feed. “When it came time for the sale in November 2019, the cattle looked terrible. They didn’t put weight on like they should have and had not shed their winter coat completely.”



A local Purina sales representative had reached out, and in 2020, they transitioned to Purina® products.

J.D. says that the difference was noticeable. “The cattle just look better,” he says. “They’re slicker. They have more muscle. They definitely look better.”

In addition to a better-looking herd, the switch delivered benefits of saved time and labor. Prior to Purina, they were hand-feeding daily. With the Intake Modifying Technology® in Purina® Accuration® supplement, they could swap to self-feeders.

They also noticed Intake Modifying Technology® encouraged snacking in their calves. “They were eating here and there throughout the day and grazing in between,” J.D. says.

Bull development and marketing

The Crews develop bulls equipped to work and thrive on regional forages.

Bulls are raised on fescue-based pastures and are supplemented with Accuration® supplement and Wind and Rain® High-Mag minerals to help express the full genetic potential of each animal.

Bulls travel the pasture from grass to shade to water to feeders. “We like to see them get some exercise and build muscle,” Jim says.

About half of their bull calves every year are developed and marketed at their private treaty bull sale. These bulls are individually selected based on phenotype, structural soundness, feed efficiency and weight gain performance, balanced expected progeny differences (EPDs), genomic profiles and carcass merit. “We perform Angus GS genomic testing to provide our customers with more accurate EPDs,” J.D. adds. Every bull also passes a breeding soundness exam and semen evaluation by a veterinarian before the sale.

The remaining calves that aren’t marketed as bulls or retained as replacement heifers are sold at the Buckingham Cattlemen’s Association Feeder Calf Sale. “We want to demonstrate to our commercial customers that our bulls will produce consistent, high-quality feeder calves that will grade well and receive above-market premiums,” says Jim.



You get what you pay for

Input costs have been hitting producers hard the last several years, and the Crews family is no different.

To help justify feed cost, Ty Davis, Purina beef cattle specialist, did a 30-day Proof Pays trial with the Crews to determine their cost-to-gain.

“It was very helpful,” says Jim. “Now, J.D. can apply that formula to evaluate our feed cost.”

“We used it on our steers this year,” adds J.D. “Even with higher feed costs, we still made money based on the cost-to-gain.”

“Based on performance, overall herd health and conception rates, we’ve been able to quantify the added value we’ve gotten from Purina® products,” Jim says. “We can justify paying a little bit more based on the quality.”

“And not having to go out to feed it every day,” J.D. tosses in.

The story of Crews Family Farms is provided as an example of an operation’s experience with Purina products and may not be a representation of actual results that can be guaranteed. Because of factors outside of Purina Animal Nutrition LLC’s control, individual results to be obtained, including but not limited to financial performance and animal condition, health or performance, cannot be predicted nor guaranteed by Purina Animal Nutrition LLC.



Get your herd ready for cold weather

Know what your herd needs before cold weather hits and learn the signs for when your cattle require additional care.



Drew Shain, Ph.D.,
cattle nutritionist

Many factors go into winter cattle care. Wind, snow, ice, freezing temperatures and mud are just a few elements that can negatively impact cattle performance. Shelter, bedding and nutrition are all key fundamentals in combatting the harsh winter months, but they’re also a lot to balance when the wind is howling and the snow is blowing.

Learn how to prepare your herd before the temperature drops and how to best care for them when they are battling the cold.

What is optimal winter body condition?

Going into winter, cows should be in good body condition. A body condition score (BCS) of 6 is an excellent place to start. As temperature drops, a cow must pull from her body stores to generate heat, especially if she’s spending the winter on low-quality forages, like crop residue, or somewhere without windbreaks or shelter.

If she’s in good condition, not only is she well insulated, but she’s also not losing heat. When a cow is not losing heat, snow accumulates on her back, giving her even more insulation.

If she’s not collecting snow on her back, that’s a sign she’s not in the condition she needs to be – she’s losing body heat, which is melting the snow. As that snow melts, it makes her coat wet, increasing her energy needs for maintenance.

Caring for under-conditioned cows

A few cows are always behind on their BCS compared with the rest of the herd. When you have cows losing condition who can’t sustain themselves through the winter, sometimes it’s best to sort off the lower-condition cows and give them an extra boost of nutrition before the weather sets in.

It may only work to sort the low-condition cows if you have separate pastures or pens where you can provide additional nutrition.

If nothing else, identify why they’re in a lower BCS. If you’ve worked through the herd and fed them appropriately to get them back into condition before winter, and they still didn’t gain weight, then there’s probably an underlying reason.

Teeth can be a significant factor in causing weight loss. Mouthing cows can answer many questions, especially with older cows. Cows missing front teeth have trouble grazing standing forage, while cows missing back teeth have difficulty



chewing and breaking down forage. Deworming cows can also be a simple fix. If they didn’t get dewormed properly or if that’s not part of your program, worms can be a significant factor in preventing a cow from absorbing nutrients.

Understanding why cows are under-conditioned can lead to a problem solved.

Identify cold stress

The telltale sign of cold cows is butts to the wind, head down and huddled in a group. Cows with a heavy winter coat may experience cold stress when temperatures approach 20°F.

Initially, in a cold-stress situation, feed intake will go up. From a grazing standpoint, they’ll start to graze more over a day or so, but then intake and grazing will start going down. Those are things that can be difficult to monitor.

The main thing to consider when cattle are experiencing cold stress is to keep them dry and out of the wind. Cows can typically adapt to cold temperatures over time as long as temperatures decrease steadily, allowing them to grow their heavy winter coat.

If you can’t get cattle inside, a windbreak, shelter or something similar can make a big difference. Bedding can also make a herd much more comfortable in bad winter weather. Not only does it help insulate where they lay, but if mud becomes a factor, it helps keep them dry. When cows get muddy, they also get wet, and a damp coat takes energy out of a cow as she tries to stay warm.

Feeding during a cold snap

Heat from digestion is a great way to help a cow warm up. That’s why we see a lot of additional forages being fed during cold winter months. Even if a cow is on pasture or corn stalks, she may need additional forage during a colder-than-normal period.

Get your herd ready for winter and have all the tools to keep them at the highest level of performance all winter long.

Contact your Purina representative to put together a winter cattle care plan for your herd.

Nutrition for winter feeding situations

High-quality forage

When forage quality is high, the main factor to monitor is protein. Ideally, protein should be around 10% or higher.

If the protein content in your forages meets this benchmark and ample forage is available, there isn’t much need for supplementation besides offering mineral. Providing Purina® Wind and Rain® mineral ensures that the cows are getting what they need and you’re feeding the rumen microbes.

Low-quality forage

When forage quality is below 10% protein, cows may benefit from supplemental protein to help feed the rumen microbes and aid in digestion.

As long as there’s plenty of forage available, Purina® RangeLand® protein tub is recommended to boost protein levels. Purina® Accuration® Hi-Fat block is another option to provide protein and additional energy for cows needing an extra boost, especially for those with a lower BCS.

Limited forage

With limited forage, creating a balanced diet is the best thing you can do for your cows. By-products, gluten feed, distillers grains and corn silage are all great sources of nutrition and energy to keep cows going. Especially when drought conditions impact forages, energy-dense diets can change the game.

A good mineral program is always critical, especially if you feed cows in a bunk scenario. In that situation, a Purina® RangeLand® mineral product would fit very well.

Extreme cold

Maintaining cattle body condition in extreme cold, even with high-quality forages, is hard. Feeding additional forage and energy-dense ingredients is key to keeping cattle going while limiting performance impacts. Using a mix of Purina® Accuration® Range Supplement 33 with corn and forage can be an option to get the extra nutrients the herd requires when it’s extremely cold.



Help keep your herd safe with feed biosecurity

Implementing simple feed management practices helps minimize the introduction and transmission of disease



Ron Scott, Ph.D., cattle nutritionist

While the threat of communicable diseases is lower in the cattle industry than in other livestock sectors like swine and poultry, having a biosecurity management plan in place is still important. Protecting your farm from outside pathogens helps your business to continue unaffected with productive, healthy cattle.

Use a combination of the following feed management practices to help reduce the risk of introducing and transmitting diseases into your herd, along with ensuring you maximize your feed resources.

Check and double-check

Feed biosecurity begins with the quality of the feed and ingredients you are purchasing. Source your feed from a reliable supplier with quality assurance programs in place to ensure animals receive exactly what they need to reach their full potential.

If you are sourcing feed that hasn't gone through quality checks, inspect it yourself to ensure it's free of rodent droppings, insects, mold, unusual odors, foreign materials or other contaminants. If any of this is present, dispose of the feed immediately.

High, dry and sealed

Your goal is to have all the feed you purchase be fed to and eaten by your cattle. Proper feed storage is a key factor in meeting that goal.

Feed should be stored in a well-ventilated, dry area. If possible, store feed in bulk bins or containers with tight-fitting lids. For bagged feed or mineral, use a pallet system to hold the bags off the ground and to reduce the risk of the feed getting wet.

Moisture is one of the main enemies of stored feed. If feed gets wet, it creates the right environment for mold growth. If wet enough, feed can rot, which invites insects to lay larvae in the feed and cause a hatch.



Pest control is a must

If you are storing feed, pest control for rodents and other pests is not an option – it's a must. In addition to destroying and eating feed, rodents carry diseases that can be transmitted to cattle. Other pests, such as birds, insects and local wildlife, can also carry and spread diseases that pose a threat to your operation.

Clean up any feed spills as they can attract wildlife, encourage spoilage and serve as a breeding ground for pests. Keep track of the pests you see on your operation and implement new management practices if a pest control problem arises.

Keep it clean

Regularly inspecting and cleaning out feed troughs is a great way to track your cattle's feed intake and prevent leftover feed from spoiling. Check for uniformity of consumption along the bunk and investigate areas where feed is being left.

Avoid putting new feed over old feed in the bunk. Over time, feed leftovers will spoil and your cattle will stop eating the feed on top due to the smell. This can reduce consumption even more.

Small changes make a big difference

Making small changes to how you manage your feed can make a world of difference in reducing the risk of biosecurity issues in your operation and lowering the financial loss due to wasted feed.

Work with your local Purina® dealer to ensure you are keeping your feed supply and herd safe.



Ask the expert!



David Newsom cattle marketing manager

David Newsom has been with Purina for over 13 years. During that time, he served as a cattle specialist and an area sales manager in the Great Lakes Region. He earned a M.S. in agriculture and M.A. in administrative dynamics from Western Kentucky University. Newsom resides in Indiana with his wife and family.



Should I start booking feed?

A: Booking feed and mineral is all about risk management. It allows you to lock in the price of the supplements, mineral or feed ingredients for your herd. Having control of that input cost removes a layer of variability and provides an opportunity to lock in potential profits for your operation.

Planning ahead is another benefit to booking feed. After all, two of Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People are:

- Be proactive
- Begin with the end in mind

Booking feed allows you to be more proactive by creating a more concrete management and production plan for your operation, including how you expect to feed and what it will cost. This plan can help you make decisions that are favorable to your bottom line while optimizing your resources.

Not sure how much feed and mineral to book? That's what we're here for!

Your Purina sales representative, cattle consultant or dealer is happy to help run projections to help estimate the right amount for your operation. The Purina® HerdSmart® program allows us to input several variables specific to your herd to help select the right nutrition program.

You can further optimize your feed investment with the 6-4-0 Feed Financing Program. You can make zero payments for up to six months during the enrollment period while Purina covers your interest charge on select Purina® cattle products.

The 6-4-0 Feed Financing Program aims to align the payment schedule with marketing schedules, allowing you to pay for feed when it makes sense for your operation.

One use-case example: Enrollment for your spring-born calves begins July 1. Creep feed your calves until weaning, and precondition calves with Purina® starters and minerals. Ideally, calves will be ready to market and sell before the end of the enrollment period on December 31, and their income can be used to pay the feed bill.

Including your Purina representative while running profitability projections, mapping out feed strategies and identifying risk management tactics is a great way to proactively work toward your end goal of running a successful and profitable operation.

Reach out to your Purina representative to take full advantage of the tools and resources available for your operation.



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⊕ THE VALUE ADD

Good help doesn't have to be hard to find

Labor in agriculture can be tough to come by. Since 1950, family farmworker labor has declined by 73%, and hired farmworker labor has dropped by 52%.¹

If you're having difficulty finding good help, consider these people:



Work with neighbors

Trading labor with your neighbor is an effective way to find help and lend them a hand as well.



Utilize youth

Local high schoolers and college students interested in agriculture are a great way to find help in the summer and on weekends.



Retired and still able

People who have retired from the workforce and still want part-time work can provide steady labor.



Hunting and fishing

If people interested in hunting or fishing don't want to pay a lease, they can provide labor, such as cutting trees and building fences.

Don't overlook your Purina® dealer as a resource. They may know of people in the area looking for work or might let you post a job on a bulletin board in the store.

Ask your Purina® dealer if they know anyone who can help.

1. USDA, Economic Research Service. Data from USDA, National Agriculture Statistics Service, Farm Labor Survey. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-labor/>. Accessed Aug. 28, 2023.

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