How self-fed supplements increase both cattle and producer efficiency

By Mark Robbins | January 08, 2020

We have often written about the delivery costs of hand-fed supplements adding greatly to the total cost of a supplement program. Yet, many times those delivery costs do not get figured into the cost of the supplement. Today, I want to look at the economics of a self-fed supplement program based on more than just the savings in the cost of delivery. Let’s focus instead on the value of a cattle producer’s time.

The true impact of ag innovations

What do self-fed supplements, 48 row corn planters, GPS navigation and net wrap all have in common? They’re more than just modern conveniences — each allows one person to accomplish more in less time. Looking at how agriculture has progressed in the last two generations, we have seen any number of innovations that allow you to do much more with your time. Much of this is not a luxury, but rather a necessity, as today’s farmers and ranchers need to operate many more acres or manage many more animals than their parents and grandparents did in order to maintain a similar standard of living.

When I was a kid, most planters were still 4 rows, and 38 to 40 inches wide. Some quick math estimates that one could get roughly 10 times as many acres planted today, with a 48 row (30-inch-row) planter. While today’s cattle herds are also bigger, they have probably not increased by a factor of 10. Of course, not all farmers are using 48 row planters yet, but the technology is there for those who either need it or simply want it. Similarly, not every cattleman uses a self-fed supplement, but they exist for those who do not have time or desire to supplement their cattle with a hand-fed supplement every day.

Similarly, net wrap costs more than twine, but many cattlemen prefer to use it. Why would that be? Advantages include less time and fuel consumed per bale, lower baling losses, better handling and transport, as well as lower storage losses. OK, now this makes “cents”.

Why self-fed supplements make cents

Several of these advantages sound similar to those of a self-fed supplement, such as less labor, less time, less fuel and, with supplement blocks, little to no wastage. The sales positioning of net wrap is also very similar to CRYSTALYX®. While the initial investment is often perceived as a higher cost per unit (per pound of crude protein or per bale), when you add up all the advantages, you often come out ahead, with a lower overall cost. As some have said, we can’t just work hard anymore; in order to get ahead we must also work smarter.
CRYSTALYX has the added advantage of having a biodegradable container option, the BioBarrel™. The BioBarrel will further your reduction in time and fuel by eliminating the need to retrieve and recycle empty steel barrels or plastic tubs. In fact, we have many customers that will no longer even consider using a self-fed supplement in a single-use plastic container.

Some of our customers with smaller herds also have a job off the farm or ranch, and others may only have 2 cowboys per 1,000 head of mother cows. Both types of operations benefit greatly from a self-fed supplement that only needs to be replaced every 2-3 weeks. Neither has the time to be delivering a supplement to cattle every day, or even every other day. As I mentioned earlier, sometimes a self-fed supplement is truly absolutely necessary.

I invite you to take a look at your tractor, baler, planter, and especially your beef cattle supplement (including the container). Have they changed in the last 10 to 30 years? If not, you’re probably missing out on some recent innovations that could add up to a significant savings on your operating costs.

CRYSTALYX Brand Supplements are available to your herd 24/7, and are an excellent way to supply protein, vitamins, minerals, fly control and they increase the utilization of your forage. All of this, with a minimal input of time, labor, equipment and delivery cost. All costs considered, CRYSTALYX and the BioBarrel will often give you the lowest total cost per head per day, with optimal results in your herd.