

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-
Lincoln Extension

Extension

1977

G77-372 Water Requirements for Beef Cattle

Paul Q. Guyer

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist>



Part of the [Agriculture Commons](#), and the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#)

Guyer, Paul Q, "G77-372 Water Requirements for Beef Cattle" (1977). *Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension*. 334.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist/334>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Extension at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.



Water Requirements for Beef Cattle

Paul Q. Guyer, Extension Beef Specialist¹

Water requirements of cattle are influenced by a number of physiological and environmental conditions. These include such things as the rate and composition of gain, pregnancy, lactation, physical activity, type of ration, salt and dry matter intake, and environmental temperature.

The minimum requirement of cattle for water is a reflection of that needed for body growth, for fetal growth or lactation, and of that lost by excretion in the urine, feces, or sweat or by evaporation from the lungs or skin. Anything influencing these needs or losses will influence the minimum requirement.

The amount of urine produced daily varies with such things as activity of the animal, air temperature, and water consumption, as well as with certain other factors. The antidiuretic hormone, vasopressin, controls reabsorption of water from the kidney tubules and ducts, and thus it affects urine excretion. Under conditions of restricted water intake, an animal may concentrate its urine by reabsorbing a greater amount of water than usual. While this capacity for concentration of the urine is limited, it can reduce water requirement some. When an animal consumes a diet high in protein or in salt or containing substances having a diuretic effect, the excretion of urine is increased and so is the water requirement.

The water lost in the feces depends largely on the diet and the species. For instance, substances in the diet which have a diarrhetic effect will increase water loss by this route. Cattle excrete feces of a high moisture content, while sheep excrete relatively dry feces.

The amount of water lost through evaporation from the skin or lungs is important and in some cases may even exceed that lost in the urine. If the environmental temperature and/or physical activity increase, water loss through evaporation and sweating increases.

From a practical point of view, all of these factors and their interplay make the minimum water requirement difficult to assess. Since feeds themselves contain some water and the oxidation of certain nutrients in feeds produces water, not all must be provided as drinking water. Feeds such as silages, green chop or pasture are usually high in moisture, while grains and hays are low. High energy feeds produce much metabolic water, while low energy feeds produce little. Fasting animals or those on a low protein diet may form water from the destruction of body protein or fat, but this is of minor significance.

Water requirements have been measured by determining voluntary water intake under a variety of

conditions. In brief, the results of these studies imply that thirst is a result of need and that animals drink to fill this need. The need results because of an increase in the electrolyte concentration in the body fluids, which activates the thirst mechanism. There is also an indication that cattle will increase water intake during hot months for its cooling effect.

As this discussion suggests, water requirements are affected by many factors and it is impossible to list specific requirements with accuracy. However, the major influences on water intake in beef cattle on typical rations are dry matter intake, environmental temperature, and lactation. The table has been designed with this in mind and is a guide only.

Estimated Daily Water Intake of Cattle

Month	Avg. Max. Temp.	Cows		Bulls	Growing Cattle ²			Finishing Cattle			
		Nursing Calves ¹	Bred Dry Cows & Heifers		400 lb	600 lb	800 lb	600 lb	800 lb	1000 lb	1200 lb
	°F	GAL	GAL	GAL	GAL	GAL	GAL	GAL	GAL	GAL	GAL
Jan.	36	11.0	6.0	7.0	3.5	5.0	6.0	5.5	7.0	8.5	9.5
Feb.	40	11.5	6.0	8.0	4.0	5.5	6.5	6.0	7.5	9.0	10.0
Mar.	50	12.5	6.5	8.6	4.5	6.0	7.0	6.5	8.0	9.5	10.5
April	64	15.5	8.0	10.5	5.5	7.0	8.5	8.0	9.5	11.0	12.5
May	73	17.0	9.0	12.0	6.0	8.0	9.5	9.0	11.0	13.0	14.5
June	78	17.5	10.0	13.0	6.5	8.5	10.0	9.5	12.0	14.0	16.0
July	90	16.5	14.5	19.0	9.5	13.0	15.0	14.5	17.5	20.5	23.0
Aug.	88	16.5	14.0	18.0	9.0	12.0	14.0	14.0	17.0	20.0	22.5
Sept.	78	17.5	10.0	13.0	6.5	8.5	10.0	9.5	12.0	14.0	16.0
Oct.	68	16.5	8.5	11.5	5.5	7.5	9.0	8.5	10.0	12.0	14.0
Nov.	52	13.0	6.5	9.0	4.5	6.0	7.0	6.5	8.0	10.0	10.5
Dec.	38	11.0	6.0	7.5	4.0	5.0	6.0	6.0	7.0	8.5	9.5

¹Cows nursing calves during first 3 to 4 months after parturition - peak milk production period.
²Requirement will be a little less for wintering on range.
 *Table derived from an article by C. F. Winchester and M. J. Morris, Vol 15, No 3, Journal of Animal Science, August, 1956.

¹Adapted from GPE-1400

**File G372 under: BEEF
 C-4, Beef Management**

Issued September 1977; 15,000 printed.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Elbert C. Dickey, Director of Cooperative Extension, University of Nebraska, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educational programs abide with the non-discrimination policies of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the United States Department of Agriculture.