

Quinn on Nutrition: Life on the ranch is all about food and nutrition

January 10 2020, by Barbara Quinn



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Now that I'm living on a ranch, I've realized something. It's all about nutrition! Yesterday, I walked my horse into the barn to feed him some extra nourishment for these colder days. There to greet us were seven

hungry barn cats ... anxious for their breakfast as well.

Maybe it's just my perspective but it certainly seems as if everything on this ranch has to do with food and nutrition. In the summer, rich green grass in the meadows provides nutrient-dense nourishment for the horses. In the fall, the grass is harvested for hay to feed the cows and horses during our harsh winters.

Also in the fall, the farmers in our area harvest their corn. They then let local ranchers graze their cattle on the corn and stalks that remain in the fields. I love the sustainability of this process. Cattle get the extra energy they need as the weather gets colder and the farmers' fields are enriched with natural organic fertilizer.

My husband consults with Callan, our local Ph.D. animal nutritionist, for the best protein and mineral formulations to feed his pregnant cows. And they'll also need additional calories from hay when pastures are under snow this winter.

Calves that were recently weaned from their mom's milk are now learning to graze on their own. They too, will need extra hay and protein supplements when the snow starts to fly.

What about us? Do we need extra energy and protein in the winter? Not really, unless we plan on standing out in a pasture during a snowstorm. When we shiver, we use up extra calories.

Interesting too, about we humans. As opposed to animals, we tend to gain weight in the colder months. That's when we like to hole up in our warm houses and get less outside exercise (unless you're a rancher). And isn't it interesting how we are attracted to high calorie comfort foods when the weather turns cold?

Animals grow heavier coats of hair when the weather turns frigid. And that requires extra nourishment in the form of calories and protein. I find it fascinating, for example, that cows from [warmer climates](#), say California, have lighter coats in the winter than cows from South Dakota. Nature is pretty smart that way.

We humans, on the other hand, wear coats and hats and gloves to warm us in the winter. No extra hair growth needed. In fact, many of us could stand to shed some of our extra layers of natural insulation during these [winter](#) months.

Nutrition can help that way, too. Drink more water. (Cold temperatures can cause us to lose more water in breathing.) Choose foods packed with more nutrients than calories such as [fresh fruit](#), vegetables, fish, poultry and lean meats. And bundle up to get some exercise when you can.

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