

The dry season can be hard on cattle - and their owners. Animals may lose weight because they don't get enough good feed. If your cattle lose weight in the dry season, it will take much longer to raise them to market size. You lose both time and money.

Some farmers have a way to solve this problem. It can prevent animals from losing weight during the dry months.

Here's how the idea works. The farmers plant a row of shrubs and trees. This is called a fodder hedge. All of these shrubs and trees have leaves that are good as cattle feed. The farmers let the hedge grow during the rainy season, without cutting it. When the dry season arrives, the cattle feed on the hedges. This keeps them well fed and healthy. They don't lose weight. In fact they may produce more milk. There may even be more butterfat in their milk. And their calves have a better chance to survive.

If you would like a steady supply of feed for your cattle during the dry season, you may want to try growing a fodder hedge. Choose shrubs and trees that grow easily in your area. The best plants for fodder hedges are leguminous trees or shrubs. Leguminous trees add nitrogen to the soil. The fresh or dried leaves, pods, flowers or bark of these plants contain important nutrients for cattle, especially protein.

There are many kinds of leguminous trees and shrubs. Some examples are: calliandra (*Calliandra calothyrsus*), leucaena (*Leucaena leucocephala*), sesbania (*Sesbania sesban*), and gliricidia (*Gliricidia sepium*).

There are many kinds of leguminous shrubs and trees that are useful for fodder hedges. To find out which plants do well in your area, talk to other farmers, or an agricultural extension agent. It's a good idea to use native plants - in other words, plants that grow naturally in your area. Because native plants grow well in your area, you can be assured of a good crop. And they're usually less expensive to grow and to care for.

There are two ways to plant a fodder hedge. One way is to plant it in a pasture. If you plant in a pasture and your cattle are tied up in another location, you will have to cut the fodder from the hedge and carry it to the cattle every day. This is called the "cut and carry" system. Cut and carry enough feed so the cattle can eat for 2 or 3 hours per day. Or you can tie up the cows beside the hedge for 2 or 3 hours a day.

Another suggestion is to plant the hedge between rows of other crops. Again, you can either cut and carry fodder, or you can let the cattle graze freely between crop rows. Of course letting cattle graze freely would only be possible at certain times - for example, immediately after the crops are harvested and before planting the next crop. Planting food and fodder crops together will provide food crops for you and feed for your cattle. Think of the benefits! The dung will fertilize your crops and the fodder hedge. At the same time the leaves from the hedge will be a mulch and fertilizer for your crops.

Fodder hedges are a low cost way to make sure that your cows eat well and maintain their weight during the dry season. Not only will your cows be happier - you will too!

"Agroforestry uses of nitrogen fixing trees and shrubs known to tolerate acid soils."

Some examples of leguminous shrubs and trees used for fodder hedges are: *Calliandra calothyrsus*, *Leucaena leucocephala*, *Sesbania sesban*, *Gliricidia sepium*, *Stylosanthes hamata*, *Acacia aneura*, *Chamaecytisus palmensis*, *Desmodium gyroides*, *D. intortum*, *D. nicaraguense*, *D. velutinum*, *D. rensonii*, *Erythrina abyssinica*, *E. berteriana*, *E. orientalis*, *E. fusca*, *Albizia lebbek*, *Alnus nepalensis*, *Cassia siamea*, *Pithecellobium dulce*, *Flemingia macrophylla*, *Cajanus cajan*.

Acknowledgements

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