

# READING A FEED TAG FOR BEEF CATTLE

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Feed costs make up the majority of input costs in beef cattle production. Understanding the information presented on a feed tag equips the buyer with knowledge required to select an appropriate feed to meet the nutritional demands of their cattle. There are a vast number of commercial feeds on the market, so comparing multiple feeds can often be a challenge. Just like a hay test is the only way to know the nutritional value of your hay, a feed tag is the only way to compare among different brands and types of commercial cattle feed. Although the tag may not have all of the information that could be useful, there are some pieces of information included.

Feed tags must include the following information, based on standards set by the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO):

- **Product name:** Specific name of the feed product. Note, if the product is medicated, the word “medicated” will appear in the product name.
- **Brand name:** Must be appropriate for intended use and consistent with guaranteed analysis.
- **Purpose statement:** Indicates which species and class of animal the feed is intended for; for example, a product might be designed for “growing calves” or “mature cows at maintenance.”
- **Medicated use statement:** If approved for use with an active ingredient, there will be a statement from the Environmental Protection Agency or Food and Drug Administration. If an ingredient is regulated under the Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD), a VFD statement will be listed.
- **Active ingredient(s):** Active ingredient(s), if applicable, and associated level.
- **Guaranteed analysis:** List of required nutrients, dependent upon the intended use of the feed and species/animal class. For beef cattle, this includes minimum crude protein, maximum equivalent protein from non-protein nitrogen, maximum crude fiber and minimum crude fat.

## Anatomy of a feed tag

**Purpose Statement**

**Medicated Use Statement**

**Active Ingredient(s)**

**Feed Ingredients**

**Manufacturer/Distributor Information**

**Net Weight/Quantity**

**Directions for use**

**Feeding and Management Instructions**

**Storage & Disposal**

**Precautionary Statements & Warnings**

**KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN**

**WARNING**

**GUARANTEED ANALYSIS**

Crude Protein (Min)	16.00%
Crude Fat (Min)	3.00%
Crude Fiber (Max)	2.00%
ASH (Max)	35.00%
Calcium (Ca) (Min)	0.50%
Calcium (Ca) (Max)	6.00%
Phosphorus (P) (Min)	0.80%
Sodium (Na) (Min)	1.50%
Magnesium (Mg) (Min)	1.50%
Potassium (K) (Min)	1.50%
Manganese (Mn) (Min)	1.50%
Cobalt (Co) (Min)	1.50%
Copper (Cu) (Min)	1.50%
Selenium (Se) (Min)	1.50%
Sulfur (S) (Min)	1.50%
Zinc (Zn) (Min)	1.50%
Vitamin A (Min)	80,000 I.U./LB
Vitamin E (Min)	100 I.U./LB

**FEED INGREDIENTS**

Beef Molasses, Dicalcium Phosphate, Monocalcium Phosphate, Calcium Carbonate, Potassium Chloride, Soybean Oil, Magnesium Oxide, Sodium Hydroxide, Dehydrated Sulfur, Meal, Sodium Selenite, Vitamin E Supplement, Vitamin A Supplement, Cobalt Carbonate, Manganese Sulfate, Manganese Sulfate, Ethylenediamine Hydrochloride, Zinc Sulfate, Ethylenediamine Hydrochloride, Basic Copper Chloride.

This product contains ethylenediamine, a preservative.

If minerals and vitamins are added, such as calcium, phosphorus and salt, those values will also be reported, with minimum and maximum levels where required. Any nutrient listed under guaranteed analysis could be subject to testing by regulatory agencies.

- ◉ You may notice that some nutrients in the guaranteed analysis are listed as “minimum” or “maximum” levels. For minimum levels of nutrients, the manufacturer cannot include less of the nutrient than the value listed on the tag. Essentially, this guarantees that you are not getting shorted on those nutrients. Nutrients with maximum levels are limited to the stated amount. For example, fiber could be used as a filler, which dilutes the nutrients available to the animal. A limit on the amount of fiber ensures that the feed is more than just a filler.
- **Feed ingredients:** May be listed as a class of ingredients, e.g., plant protein products, or individual ingredients, e.g., calcium carbonate. This will tell you the source of nutrients listed in the guaranteed analysis, listed in descending order by weight.
- **Manufacturer/distributor information:** The name that appears here is responsible for the product and any associated regulatory compliance. Distributors use a statement “manufactured for” or “distributed by” to differentiate themselves from manufacturers.
- **Net weight/quantity:** Weight and quantity, as packaged.
- **Directions for use:** Details the safe and effective use of the feed.
- **Feeding and management instructions:** A detailed set of instructions on the feed’s intended use. Describes how the product should be fed, typically including a specific range of feeding rates. When a product is not feed according to label directions, the feed may not perform as intended as the full nutritional benefits may not be realized.
- **Storage and disposal:** Instructions for storage, handling and disposal.
- **Precautionary statements and warnings:** Describe potential hazards for humans and domestic animals. For example, cattle feeds contain much higher amounts of copper than what is tolerable by sheep. A cattle feed tag may warn “do not feed to sheep” to reduce the risk of copper toxicity. Withdrawal times may also be included here to ensure no residues are present a slaughter.

What are some things that are not on the feed tag?

- **Nutrients needed by cattle that are not required to be guaranteed on the tag.** A great example is energy. Energy values like NEm and TDN are calculated rather than measured, so they cannot be listed as guaranteed. There are ways to estimate TDN based on crude fiber ( $80 - \% CF = \% TDN$ ) or by knowing the primary ingredients. Note that this is only an estimate, but it’s a place to start if you are interested in knowing the TDN value. It’s also a good idea to talk with your feed dealer about the product to find out more.
- **Nutrient and ingredient quality or bioavailability.** Ingredient quality, stability and availability may vary based on the source. An example might be bioavailability of zinc sulfate versus zinc amino-acid complex and how much of each compound is in the feed.
- **The feed recipe.** The actual amounts of each ingredient are not on the label. The batch mix sheet has this information, if you have access to it.



- **Feed ingredients within a collective term.** A collective term for a group of ingredients allows ingredients within a group to be interchanged based on ingredient availability. For example, “plant protein products” can remain on the feed tag even if the manufacturer switches between soybean meal and cottonseed meal based on availability.

So, a feed tag can provide some great information but not all information. A useful indicator of a successful and high-quality nutrition program is animal performance. Keep an eye on body condition and average daily gain, and if you begin to see that cattle are not reaching a desired performance level, adjust the feeding program as needed. Talk with a nutritionist if you have more questions about appropriate selection of feedstuffs.

## REFERENCES

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