

## Bedding Without Straw

**P**roper bedding is an integral part of any beef production system. Here are some information and ideas if your straw supply is limited.

**Plan** – Think through your winter bedding season. Look at what you have done in the past for an idea of volume of material needed. Consider what class of livestock at what times of the year will need bedding. What are your material alternatives?

**Space** – Think about how to have more space per animal wintered than you have ever had before. This concept includes feeder cattle, replacements, cows and the bulls. Try to have the animals in large areas, so they do not loiter and socialize on the bedding area. Try to locate the bedding area away from the feed and water areas. Plan your wind shelter needs now.

**Snow** – Mature livestock with access to fresh undisturbed soft snow can bed in it, stay clean and have some insulation provided. Compacted, frozen, hard, dirty snow does not offer insulation. With lots of space, and perhaps portable wind shelters, snow can work as a viable bedding option.

**Wood fiber** – This is a viable alternative currently used extensively in the feedlot industry. Generally speaking, wood has more moisture absorbency but less insulation value than straw. Feedlot cattle have been shown to keep cleaner with wood products than straw. The volume of manure removed from wood fiber bedded pens was less than straw bedded pens. Some purchasing considerations would be:

- per cent moisture of the product (kiln-dried may be 10 %, with chips at 45 %)
- product type (e.g. bark, shavings, chips, sawdust, paper and mixes of these)

- dollar value of product at plant and cost for delivery
- volume discounts (often over 1,000 tonnes)
- delivery time frame
- payment terms
- contaminants (e.g. large wood pieces, glue, etc.)

Most wood processing plants, from fencepost to furniture manufacturing processors, have small particle wood byproducts. Realize that they have developed an existing market for these products, and you are trying to change their business arrangement. The wood fiber may be relatively inexpensive compared to the cost of freight to your farm.

**Peat moss** – This product is currently used in the horse industry. If you have peat land or access to it nearby, it could provide a bedding alternative. Issues would be getting it stock piled and dry, dustiness of the product and contaminants in the product.

Remember, an animal with a wet, dirty hair coat and without insulation from the cold will have a significant increase in feed requirements during the colder days of winter.

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