

BROWN MID-RIB VARIETIES IMPROVE QUALITY

Sudangrass. Cane. Sorghum-sudan hybrids. Forage sorghum. Millet. These summer annuals can produce lots of forage even under dry growing conditions. But they tend to be more stemmy and less digestible than many cattle producers prefer. Can they be made better?

These days the answer is – yes. A natural, genetic trait called bmr is being used in many varieties and hybrids of summer annual grasses to make them more digestible. This enables your cattle to extract more energy from these forages.

Bmr stands for ‘brown mid-rib’. It received this name because the mid-rib or vein that runs down the center of each leaf has a brownish tint in summer annual grasses that have this genetic trait. Normally this mid-rib is a whitish color.

Mid-rib color, though, is not what is important. The important characteristic is how the bmr gene affects forage quality. Grasses that have the bmr gene produce less lignin than normal plants. Lignin is a complex compound that attaches to fiber components like cellulose in the plant and make it less digestible. Since plants with the bmr gene produce less lignin, more of the fiber can be digested by your cattle, increasing the energy or TDN value of this forage. In addition, animals eat more of the stems, reducing waste.

The bmr gene has little other affect on these plants, so they respond like normal plants to other management practices, like planting rate, fertilization, and harvest timing.

Improving forage quality is important for your livestock’s performance. Give bmr forages a try and I think you will be pleased.

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