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## **MAKE PASTURE FERTILIZING PAY**

With the recent break in March and the nice weather, Bruce Anderson, extension forage specialist at UNL, reminds us his take on fertilizing pastures, especially brome or cool-season grass pastures. Does fertilizing pay?

Grass growth is stimulated by nitrogen fertilizer just like other crops. With nitrogen fertilizer costing 60 cents or more per pound, does it pay to fertilize pasture? If we can increase calf gains enough to more than pay for the fertilizer bill is the issue.

Our Nebraska research shows that you get about one pound of additional calf or yearling gain for every pound of nitrogen fertilizer applied. With pasture grazing land becoming more scarce and the value of cattle gains exceeding a dollar per pound, boosting yield with fertilizer should be especially valuable this year.

However, this fertilization rule-of-thumb assumes that the amount applied is within our general recommendations, which are based on the potential amount of extra grass growth expected. This is affected mostly by moisture. More importantly, it also assumes that your grazing management will efficiently harvest this extra growth.

If your animals graze continuously on one pasture throughout the season, much of the extra growth is wasted. They trample, manure and foul, bed down on, and simply refuse to eat much of the stemmy grass. Less than one-third of the extra grass ends up inside your livestock.

To make fertilizer pay, cross-fence pastures to control when and where your animals graze. Give animals access to no more than one-fourth of your pasture at a time. Graze off about one-half of this growth before moving to another subdivision. Maybe even save one subdivision for hay. If your pastures aren't subdivided, fertilizer dollars might be better spent on cross-fences and watering sites. By following these suggestions more of your pasture growth will be eaten, and more profits will come from fertilizer and pastures.

At the cow-calf meeting at Saline Center last week, 43% in attendance were looking for more pasture for their current cow-calf operations. None of the people who attended the meeting were looking to exit the business in the next five years and many were looking to add cows or be somewhat steady in their growth. Only one-third of about 35 who responded had used distiller's grains to supplement stalks or pastures. I look for that number to grow. About 60 percent said their calf losses were below their farm average this year so calving season thus far has been very good to us. So there is some enthusiasm to grow some cow-calf enterprises as documented at the Saline Center meeting.

Dennis Bauer from Ainsworth talked about a new UNL study supplementing yearlings on brome grass pasture with distillers grain (DDGS). The question here was can you stock at densities typical of fertilized pasture, yet not use the fertilizer. The calves gained better on DDGS. As designed the non-fertilized and fertilized pasture cattle gained identical, but at different stocking



densities. The extra weight was maintained all the way through finishing. Daily gains on the brome grass and fertilized brome grass were 1.37 but with unfertilized brome and distillers the gain was 1.95 lbs per head per day. Calves came into the study averaging 757 pounds and came off the grass at 977 pounds and grass with DDGS supplementation at 1,065 pounds. There is enough research and Dennis showed a slide on predictability of gains with calves on distillers, that growers can use to make better decisions to meet their goals. We will see more creative ways to utilize distillers grain in cow-calf operations in the future.

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