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## Stalk Grazing Concerns

Fall rains are good for wheat and will provide stored water for next year's crop. There are always drawbacks and quality of stalk grazing is suffering this year in several ways.

We have had a tremendous corn crop and very good milo crop this year. When this occurs usually the remaining stalk pasture has a reduced carrying capacity. More nutrients were converted into corn rather than gathered in the stalk and not processed. The old standard concept was an acre of corn stalks can carry a cow for 30 days. The good crop year, the trait corns which are quite efficient in producing corn and less corn on the ground all lessen the stalk carrying capacity.

Several hail storms in the DeWitt to Adams corridor, the Diller-Odell area, and the Barneston area not only lowered crop yield in some cases, but also have lowered stalk quality by increasing plant infections of stalk rot and smut. These stalks are weathering quicker than is usual.

Rain also reduces the feed value of corn stalks in fields already combined, and even on standing stalks. And this fall many fields have had some pretty heavy rain on those stalks. Rain reduces corn stalk quality several ways. Most easily noticed is how fast stalks get soiled or trampled into the ground when fields are muddy. Less noticeable are nutritional changes. Heavy rain soaks into dry corn stalk residue and leaches out some of the soluble nutrients. Most serious is the loss of sugars and other energy-dense nutrients, which lowers the TDN or energy value of the stalks. These same nutrients also disappear if stalks begin to mold or rot in the field or especially in the bale. Then palatability and intake also decline.

There is little you can do to prevent these losses. We are fortunate in our area in having several alternatives to this lower stalk quality. We have lots of stalks in comparison to the cattle we have and can move cattle onto fresh stalks. This may mean renting stalks from neighbors and working on water sources and fencing. Or we could run a rake lightly across fields and bale loose residue for feeding with hay and or distillers grains.

Since weathering by rain reduces TDN more than it reduces protein, consider the energy value of your supplements as well as protein content. Weathered corn stalks still are economical feeds. We need to use all the lower cost feeds we can to keep costs in line. We just may need to alter our feeding and supplements to account for the weathering.

The value of nutrients removed from a stalk field by grazing is variable. It may vary for \$3 to \$7 per acre. This sets a bottom line for the value of stalk pasture. If we fed hay for the same period of time the cost could be from \$20 to \$35 this sets a top line. I feel reasonable and fair stalk rent values would range from \$8 to \$15 per acre. Water access, location, CSP contract arrangements and fencing are major issues in determining access and value. The value of calves is low enough this fall to put downward pressure on all feed values.

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