

October 27, 2017

## GET THE MOST FROM GRAZING

One of our Nebraska advantages in agriculture is cattle and corn. This past week our Ag Agents Association in Nebraska were involved in a Panhandle Educational Tour and I love that fall Nebraska scene of harvested corn and cattle on stalks that we saw traveling from Lincoln to Scottsbluff and back.

We are number 1 in the nation on beef and veal exports, commercial red meat production, commercial cattle slaughter and all cattle on feed or 2.47 million head in January of 2017. We are 4<sup>th</sup> in the nation with 1.9 million beef cows. We are number 3 in the nation on corn production or 1.7 billion bushels and 987 million bushels of corn exports. But once that bushel is sold and shipped out of Nebraska there is generally no more added value for that bushel of corn leaving our state.

Farmers and ranchers have choices they can make when grazing corn stalks immediately after corn harvest. It can be managed in a way to get the most of the forage or corn harvest residue. Grazing corn stalks during the winter has many benefits. It can save over a dollar a day per cow compared to feeding expensive hay.

The way farmers manage grazing of stalks by their cattle can have a big effect on its success. Bruce Anderson, forage specialist at UNL, says for instance, maybe you want to feed as little protein supplement as possible while winter grazing. In this case it's imperative you have enough acres of corn stalks lined up so your cattle only need to select just the higher quality plant parts to eat. And whenever the grain and husks are gone, move to a fresh field.

Some cattlemen use corn stalks just as a filler to keep cattle from bellowing while they limit feed corn, distiller's grains, or other more nutrient dense feeds. For these cattlemen, high stocking levels and unrestricted access might be best for this management situation.

Another strategy is to stretch winter stalks as far as possible. In that case, restricting animal access to smaller areas at a time by strip grazing until nearly all the grazable stalk parts are gone might be best. Be careful, though, about forcing cows to eat the lower stalks. They won't get much protein or energy from lower stalks and the nitrate levels sometimes can be an issue, especially on drought damaged corn.

Farmers are starting to utilize cover crops on wheat stubble ground, silage ground and aerial seeded into row crop fields in that early September window. This opens up a new realm of grazing management opportunities. These same cover crop mixes also tend to be soil improvers, suppressing weed growth and mining nutrients from deep down in the sub soil and bringing them to the soil surface. With their aggressive growth, they also tend to increase soil organic matter both from the grazing animal's manure and from the decaying plant's leaves, stems and roots and more so from the roots. I really liked this NTV report last week from a Trumbull, Nebraska farmer pertaining to his cover crop strategy this fall at: <http://ow.ly/GSik30g6dlf> He has his cover crop expense justified in the interview.



The bottom line is whatever your strategy, consider carefully what kind of nutrition animals are getting from the stalk pasture so you neither underfeed nor overfeed expensive supplements. Be sure to provide salt, calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin A free choice at all times. And once all the grain is gone, cows need about half a pound per day of an all-natural protein to meet nutrient needs. The key is all natural because other forms of protein are not fully utilized in the rumen when grazing low quality forages.

Corn, ethanol distillers grain by-product, corn stalks and cattle, it truly is our Nebraska advantage.

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