

Column Name - The Heartland Minute

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*“Feeding Corn Stalk Bales”*

Eating a salad full of stems would be considered less than palatable by most people. Similarly, cattle offered corn stalks in place of hay will not find those as an attractive meal option. However, with the drouth this year, it is a reality many are facing to utilize every feed source they can. Many areas are facing hay shortages and a decrease of pasture availability.

In more normal years, many producers will graze corn residue once it has been harvested for grain. Those cattle can then eat the husks and leaves, which have some nutritional value. This year many farmers and ranchers have elected to bale up the corn stalks after harvest, which leaves only the stalks that are lignified and indigestible.

When cattle are offered a corn stalk bale, they will consume the resource at a higher proportion of stalks than they would if they were just grazing the field. Often times, the bales fed by themselves will result in a larger amount of wastage unless they are added to a mixed ration. Feeding corn stalk bales will require protein supplementation. In addition, cattle entering their third trimester going in to spring calving will have higher maintenance requirements. Therefore, they will also need energy supplementation on top of protein.

There is also an added health concern with feeding corn stalk bales made from a failed crop. If nitrogen fertilizer was applied in the spring and it failed, then the plant has the potential to still be holding on to excess nitrogen. In that case, it is recommended to test the bales for nitrates.

The Extension office recognizes these difficult conditions and decisions producers are facing. With that in mind we have scheduled several meetings to help producers troubleshoot these challenging conditions.

Information comes from KSU beef cattle nutritionist, Phillip Lancaster.

For more information regarding upcoming programs, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Ben Sims, at benjam63@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.