

Another Plus For Alfalfa

ELDON COLE

MT. VERNON, MO.

If you've been around me very much you know how big a supporter I am of alfalfa for beef cattle. When I first came to this part of the state the feeling was that alfalfa was too good and too expensive for beef cattle. I think that feeling has changed a bit over the years. I know that cows and/or calves that have some alfalfa included in their rations perform better. The closest thing I see to a "silver bullet" to counteract fescue toxicosis is alfalfa.

I read a research report from Montana State, Ohio State and the University of Idaho in the latest Journal of Animal Science that may support some of the observations we've made with alfalfa. Most of their trial included alfalfa with

orchardgrass and not fescue. However, they did make reference to earlier work with fescue. In those trials, 25 percent alfalfa and the balance of the dry matter fescue for lambs had a positive effect on the rate of dry matter disappearance.

Other features noted by alfalfa's inclusion with grass hays include: greater dry matter intake; the impact of dry matter digestibility is greater with late, but not early maturity orchardgrass; a faster rate of passage of the small particles of orchardgrass. Four to 5 pounds of alfalfa hay per head per day stacks up very nicely in nutritional value as well as economics compared to 2 or 3 lbs. of cubes or by-product feeds or 1 pound of a lick tub. Δ

Eldon Cole is Livestock Specialist with the University of Missouri Extension at Mt. Vernon.