

Backgrounding Options

Trial Looks At Feed Options To Produce Higher Daily Gains

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Cattlemen attending the Missouri Beef Tour for Cape Girardeau and Bollinger counties recently learned about some backgrounding options that support daily gains in their calves. Presenting the information was Dr. Justin Sexten, MU Extension Assistant Professor/Beef Specialist.

"A lot of our producers will background weaned calves using ad lib or free choice hay in a bale ring feeder and provide some level of protein supplementation; and so today we are looking at two different protein sources to balance the supplements for amino acids," he said.

Historically, that has been done on a high level of performance. However, not much work has been done on moderate levels of performance, when calves show weight gains under two pounds a day.

"So, we put these calves on free choice hay for 84 days last winter, supplemented them at 1 percent of body weight with a 25 percent corn based supplement, then used either distillers grains or high bypass protein soybean meal plus distillers grains as the protein supplement," Sexten explained. "When we looked at the performance over the backgrounding period we didn't see any additional benefits to using the high bypass protein; so we hypothesized that we just ran out of energy for those cattle, we had the protein suitable for high levels of gain, but we didn't have enough energy in the hay and the supplement.

"Then we put the cattle on a common finishing diet. We use a lot of no-roughage diets on campus; by no-roughage we mean whole shelled corn and some supplement. However in a steer stuffer or self feeder, those diets don't work nearly as well because we get particle separation.

The unique aspect of this system was Sexten hadn't tried cracked corn in no-roughage systems. So he showed the group some feed he used that was cracked very fine. The question was whether there is an increase in acidosis with this system.

"We had 100 head of steers and heifers on feed that averaged 3.3 pounds a day," he said. "The cattle did well, converting at a feed to gain of 6.5. Now what we have started to test is a practical system that you can use on farm to finish cattle without having to grind seven to 10 percent roughage into the diet, which is a big challenge for smaller scale operations."

The carcass data on the two experiments showed there wasn't any difference in the two backgrounding treatments; it really was just a production experiment that looked at the protein supplement, and no effects were seen.

"However, this experiment was also a bit of a test in terms of 'can we crack corn in our no-

roughage diets?;' and to this point we have been successful with that," he said.

"Our plan now is to do a couple of things: One, we want to increase the level of supplementation in the backgrounding phase to see if we get the 2.25 or 2.5 pounds a day gain and if that protein supplementation pays off. The next thing we want to do is run the finishing trial again with the cracked corn to verify again that we do get along as well as we think we do on



Producers attending The Missouri Beef Tour for Cape Girardeau and Bollinger counties received backgrounding options from Dr. Justin Sexten, MU Extension Assistant Professor and Beef Specialist.

Photo by John LaRose, Jr.

that model."

While the trial is ongoing, Sexten has a take-home message for cattlemen:

"If you're backgrounding calves on pasture or a self fed hay system and you supplement those calves at 1 percent of body weight with a co-product based feed, with a 25 percent corn, we're looking at 1.7 pounds a day gain," he said. "At least, that's what we observed and that's fairly typical of what we see at 1 percent of body weight of supplementation. At that level of gain we really don't see advantages to different protein supplements, at least the two that we tried here.

"So if you use corn gluten feed, distillers grains or wheat middlings or something along those lines with a lot of versatility, you should find out which one is most cost effective and go with that. Also if you're thinking about finishing cattle, we have some systems available now that would allow you to do that without having bale ring feeders and self feeders in the same feedlot type of scenario." Δ

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