

Beef-Herd Owners Learn To Use Fall Grass To Supplement Poor-Quality Drought Hay

COLUMBIA, MO.

Don't waste good grass growth this fall, a University of Missouri nutritionist tells cow-herd owners. Use it as supplement for low-quality hay.

Justin Sexten, with MU Extension, says high-quality grass can replace high-priced grain to be fed with poor hay. All it takes is wise use of a single-strand electric fence.

In talks across the state, Sexten tells beef producers how to cut costs on winter feeding. The "after-drought" meetings help herd owners keep their cows.

Sexten urges cattle producers to look at low-cost alternatives, such as byproduct feeds.

Producers have learned to stockpile pasture growth for grazing after frost stops growth for the winter.

There's never enough stockpiled forage, Sexten says. The best use is to parcel it out as a supplement to improve use of available hay.

Nutrient quality of fall stockpiled pasture will be higher than most hay baled during the prolonged summer drought. Quality tests show low levels of crude protein and energy in hay.

Sexten says hay that tests less than 7 percent crude protein needs supplemental feed to keep cows' rumens working efficiently.

Forage tests on stockpiled fescue grass show 15 to 17 percent crude protein. That's more than what's needed to maintain cows, Sexten says.

Sexten outlines a plan he will use with the cow herd at the MU Beef Research Center, Columbia. Like most producers this year, he has plenty of poor-quality hay that needs supplements.

He also has a good stand of fall stockpiled grass.

Starting the first of November, instead of turning cows into the pasture, he will fence off a strip of fresh grass each day for cows to graze. A movable electric fence will be used.

The fresh grass provides needed supplemental nutrients. Low-quality baled hay will be un-

rolled near the grass strip. After the cows eat the preferred grass, they will eat the less nutritious hay.

The process is repeated each day.

Cows take poor-quality forage into their rumen, the stomach for digesting fiber. However, microbes in the rumen that digest fiber must have at least 7 percent crude protein to keep working. Protein supplement can come from grain, byproduct feeds or grass. The grass also contains high levels of energy, which poor hay lacks.

The use of a hot-wire fence in management-intensive grazing improves efficient use of pasture grasses.

Tall fescue, the most widely used grass in Missouri, is well-suited for stockpiling for winter feed.

This past summer most Missouri pastures grew little grass during the prolonged drought. However, in many locations pastures revived with fall rains starting with remnants of Hurricane Isaac.

"With high-quality stockpiled grass, cows should not be turned into an undivided pasture," Sexten says. "Without controlled grazing, cows waste about 40 percent of the grass. They'll walk on it, sleep on it or worse. With restricted grazing, they'll eat most of the grass without stopping to do those other things.

"It would be a terrible waste to turn cows in on such high-quality feed."

Sexten teaches forage nutrition at the three-day grazing schools at the MU Forage Systems Research Center, Linneus, Mo. That school trains the trainers for regional grazing schools held across the state each year.

The grazing schools also teach producers how to both measure and estimate the amount of dry-matter content available in an acre of grass. This allows calculation of forage rations to meet livestock nutrient needs.

For information on grazing schools, contact county MU Extension centers or USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service offices. Δ