

Angus Talk

Outtakes and interviews from Angus Talk radio



Preparing for a dry summer

Angus Talk host Doug Medlock recently visited with Carl Dahlen, beef extension specialist with North Dakota State University. Now based in Fargo, N.D., Dahlen grew up in northwest Minnesota. Working on a wide variety of beef operations gave him an appreciation for the diversity in types of operations and operators.

With an emphasis on reproductive efficiency in beef herds, Dahlen focuses on nutritional considerations that contribute to overall herd fertility, such as how nutrition before and during pregnancy contributes to the success of that pregnancy and how management strategies affect overall herd fertility.

Medlock and Dahlen discussed flushing cows (putting them in a positive energy balance) before breeding and the importance of developing a drought-management plan. We catch up with their interview as they address the use of alternative feedstuffs.

Alternative feedstuffs

Q: Are summer annuals a grazing option?

A: Certainly summer annuals are good options. ... It's a matter of asking, "Do we have tillable land available? Can we go ahead and do this?"

The other option is planting a short-season crop — peas or something like that — they can get off maybe mid-July or August and put in a cover crop, such as radishes, turnips, peas, soybeans, sunflowers. There's many, many different types of things that people are planting into cover crops. That growth will extend the grazing season.

What's unique about cover crops is that as our native and pasture grasses are losing forage quality, those cover crops are retaining a pretty good protein content and good nutrient profiles later out into the year. Cover crops are a really great option for people who are looking to extend the grazing season.

Also, we've seen people wean calves and put them onto cover crops. Calves can really benefit from that higher nutrient profile, instead of some old late-summer grasses.

Q: What are some nontraditional feed resources to consider?

A: When we talk about nontraditional feedstuffs, it really, really opens up a door. We've got a publication that's called *Alternative Feeds for Ruminants* with about 30 pages of different things people can feed. We've got some fibrous forages and hull products, the distillers' grains, cover crops, alfalfa pellets, things like that. ... We can use grains, grain-hull products. We can move into some of the oil feeds, and then even some liquid cull products that are available.

Again, all of the things that are in this

publication have stemmed from questions we've gotten from producers — questions like, "I've got this random feedstuff that I have available from whatever location, so how do I incorporate that into a feed ration?" We took that information and put together this publication.

Q: That's going to change depending on what part of the country you're in, right?

A: Certainly. All of these local processing plants and local crop production [will] dictate what type of products are available. Up in this region, we've got some ethanol production, so we've got distillers' grains, condensed distillers' solubles, and some grain screenings and grain processing. They'll produce pastas and things like that, so it goes from screening to actual pasta that didn't make human-grade.

[It's the] same thing on the potato-production side. It's interesting to come into some of the different cattle yards that we work with, both feedyards and cow-calf producers, and see everything from potato skins moving into French fries that haven't been boiled. Then we have tater tots and French fries that have gone through an entire process and [were] just culled out right before the bagging process. In the southeast United States, we get into some of the citrus byproducts available there.

Locality definitely influences what type of alternative feeds are available.

Q: Where can beef producers go to find out what byproducts and food-waste products are available?

A: Your local Extension service can get you a list of alternative byproducts and prices that gives a summary of the different types of

products, where their producers [are], what the contact information is for that particular production site and what the current prices are. The best thing to do is just beat the bushes and talk to people about it.

Q: Which alternative feed sources are most budget-friendly?

A: Certainly time of year impacts how these products are priced out. If we have byproducts that are limited in supply, maybe not a lot of people know about them, so we may be able to get them bought pretty reasonably.

The distillers' products historically have been a pretty good deal based on the price of corn. There was a time earlier this year where that wasn't the case. The moral of the story is to always be on the lookout for these alternative products when they come up, then really take time to compare the values of those feedstuffs.

We've got another publication ... comparing the value of feedstuffs. In order to do this we certainly need to know not only what is the name of this product, but look at the actual nutrient profile of this product and break down how much protein we have in there, how much energy we have, what is the dry-matter content of these products? Then [we] compare or calculate out what it costs per unit of protein or per unit of energy, and compare that with our traditional feedstuff of a known value.

If we say the value of corn is \$3.50 a bushel, we calculate out what that value per pound of energy is. If we get a byproduct that is much cheaper per pound of energy, then we can calculate out what our transport cost is, what our storage cost is. If it is still a better buy than corn at that point, pull the trigger and get it sourced.

Q: How can beef producers utilize crop residue as a viable feedstuff?

A: Crop residue can be an amazing feedstuff. We can graze corn stubble. We can graze soybean fields. We can turn around and bale some of that residue. Crop residue with the right class of cattle at the right time of the year can be wonderful.

Q: If producers are feeding wheat straw or poor-quality hay, what do they need to supplement?

A: We have to worry, No. 1, about protein.

Protein and vitamins and minerals in poor-quality feeds typically are not as high as they are in other feeds. Look at the stages of production that we're dealing with. Are we dealing with dry cows? Are we dealing with cows with calves [at] side? Are we dealing with heavy yearlings? Each one of those will have a scenario where it will work to use some of these poor-quality feeds.


Q: Are there treatments to improve digestibility?

A: If we bale this corn residue, we can treat it with lime or calcium hydroxide. That certainly works to increase digestibility. People

have done the same thing with just adding water to some of these poor-quality feedstuffs. Adding corn syrup or condensed distillers' solubles onto that crop residue and letting it sit can increase the palatability of that feed for cattle.

The other thing that we've seen work is to take liquid supplements and add those onto bales of corn or poor-quality hay. Let that soak in for improved intake and digestibility.

The other thing to avoid with these poor-quality feeds is using excessive supplements that contain a high level of carbohydrates. Adding corn to poor-quality forage can negatively impact the fiber digestibility, so

put some type of supplement out there, like a distillers' that has a little bit more of the fiber, and stay away from the carbohydrates. It'll improve digestibility. 

Editor's Note: To access the publications referred to in this interview, look up "AF1182" at <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/publications>, or use any search terms to find the topics that interest you.

Hosted by Doug Medlock, the American Angus Association's Angus Talk radio show features conversations with industry personalities from across the country. The program is broadcast each Saturday at 10 a.m. CT on Sirius XM's Rural Radio, Channel 147. Outtakes featured here are edited.