

Forages: Principles, Practices & Profitability

Forage specialists emphasize forage-management strategies can lessen reliance on grain.



Story & photos by **Kindra Gordon**, field editor

Longtime forage specialists Garry Lacefield and Don Ball informed and entertained attendees with their forage knowledge during a Learning Lounge session Jan. 29 in San Diego, Calif., at the 2016 Cattle Industry Convention & NCBA Trade Show. The duo, who are longtime friends, both have professor emeritus status — Ball from Auburn University and Lacefield from the University of Kentucky.

Lacefield shared several sobering statistics.

- ▶ Food production must increase 50%-70% to supply enough food for the 9-plus billion people who will populate the planet by 2050.
- ▶ It's estimated 70%-100% more animal protein (meat and dairy) will be needed with this increased population.
- ▶ There has been a loss of 1 million acres of ag land in the United States each year for the past 25 years.

Lacefield noted those are all challenges that agriculture must address as food is produced to feed the world. Additionally, he acknowledged that grain feeding will always exist, but he expressed his belief that opportunities exist to improve forage management and to lessen time on grain, which in turn may reduce costs.

With regard to food production, Lacefield noted the question must always be asked: "How much did it cost to get there?"

To improve profitability, Ball shared that there are several strategies to evaluate. Topping the list is to know your forage crop options and your animals' nutritional needs.

Additional strategies include exercising good grazing management, utilizing legumes, minimizing stored feed needs and soil testing, among others.

Most importantly, Ball emphasized, "Results require investments. You rarely get something for nothing."

Lacefield concluded, "The goal should

be to have a system that will optimize the number of days grazing and minimize the number of days using stored feed. Every day grazed is money saved."

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Editor's Note: Kindra Gordon is a freelance writer and cattewoman from Whitewood, S.D. This article was written as part of Angus Media's online coverage of the 2016 Cattle Industry Convention & NCBA Trade Show. For additional coverage, visit the Newsroom at www.4cattlemen.com.



▶ **Above:** Garry Lacefield expressed his belief that opportunities exist to improve forage management and to lessen time on grain, which in turn may reduce costs.



▶ **Right:** Don Ball emphasized, "Results require investments. You rarely get something for nothing."

Simple steps to more profitable pastures

"The easiest and cheapest way to improve profitability is to improve pastures," Dow's Scott Flynn told attendees during a Learning Lounge session at the 2016 Cattle Industry Convention & NCBA Trade Show Jan. 28. Flynn estimates that, particularly in high-rainfall areas, landowners give up about 30% of their pasture's potential due to lack of weed control.

"Pastures are a cheap source of feed for cattle," he added, making them worth the investment to renovate or improve.

That said, pasture improvements are not something accomplished in a single day, Flynn emphasized. "It may take a year of planning or a few growing seasons to plan and address issues before you are ready to plant."

Among the important considerations for pasture improvements, Flynn noted that the needs of the operation should first be identified before forages are selected. Additionally, soil-fertility issues and invasive-species control should be evaluated.

Once it's time to plant, timing of planting, seedbed preparation, equipment used and investing in certified seed are important, he underscored. He also emphasized the need to have a plan to address weed issues after planting to ensure long-term success of the pasture improvements.

Learn more about pasture renovation tools at www.dowagro.com/en-us/range/.

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