

2019 USAFRI Research Project Objectives

“Alfalfa for Beef Cows” Publication Update University of Kentucky - Smith

Project Award: \$9,464

Justification:

- Alfalfa, high in protein, energy, and minerals, has long been a staple crop for dairy cattle herds across the US. Recent economic pressures in the dairy industry are forcing many dairies out of business or encouraging shifts to other commodities. In Kentucky, we have seen some dairymen moving to beef cattle production, joining the already 34,000 beef cattle producers in the state. In the U.S. there are currently 727,000 beef cattle farms and ranches and cattle sales for 2019 are projected at \$69 billion (<https://www.ncba.org/beefindustrystatistics.aspx>). These producers represent a huge untapped potential for on-farm alfalfa production and stored feed sales. Many beef cattle producers, particularly in the Midwestern and Western states, already use alfalfa in their rations, but the potential across the U.S. is likely larger than the dairy industry. For this reason, we feel that the publication, “Alfalfa for Beef Cows,” should be updated for the ration formulations and market conditions that exist today. Originally commissioned by the Certified Alfalfa Seed Council and useful 25 years ago, this publication is in need of a major revision with new terminology, high-resolution photographs reflecting BMP practices and modern breeds, and recently published data on the value of alfalfa in beef cattle rations.

The University of Kentucky is proposing to update this publication, and we feel we are uniquely suited to do so. UK has been conducting alfalfa variety yield trials for many years and has the longest running grazing tolerance variety trials for alfalfa in the U.S. (over 23 years). Kentucky producers across the state successfully grow, harvest, feed and graze alfalfa and have a close working relationship with the county extension offices and the Forage Extension Specialists in the state. One of the highest recorded beef cattle production/acre/year in the U.S. was on a pasture in southern KY at 1,400 lbs/acre.

Objectives:

- The objective of this project is to 1) completely revise the outdated national publication “Alfalfa for Beef Cows” including current market conditions and best management practices, updated photographs, and recently published data.