

NAFA

Title: Re-Writing of “Alfalfa for Beef Cows”

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Abstract:

Alfalfa is recognized as a productive and highly nutritional forage for ruminants. It has been a staple of dairy rations for decades, notably as a forage derived supplemental protein source. The productivity of alfalfa can vary, but yields of 3-6 tons of dry matter per acre or more make it an attractive crop for ruminants requiring higher protein diets. Beef cattle managers have been less inclined to grow alfalfa, despite its high productivity and nutritional value. However, increasing market volatility for grain and coproduct feedstuffs provides an opportunity for greater use of alfalfa in beef cattle diets. This twelve page publication layouts the benefits of alfalfa for beef cows, and discusses how to integrate it into stocker, cow/calf, and other beef operations. Major sections include: Why consider alfalfa for beef cattle?, Alfalfa as a protein source, Alfalfa as an energy source, Alfalfa as a source of vitamins and minerals, Harvest management of alfalfa,

Utilizing alfalfa in beef herds, Interseeding, Breeding and selection of alfalfa, and Grazing alfalfa. This publication also includes over 20 high quality photos and extensive research data.

Introduction:

In the U.S. there are currently 727,000 beef cattle farms and ranches. 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. However, the previous Alfalfa for Beef Cows publication was originally commissioned by the Certified Alfalfa Seed Council 25 years ago, and was in need of a major revisions with new terminology, high-resolution photographs reflecting BMP practices and modern breeds as well as more recent data on the value of alfalfa in beef cattle rations.

Materials and Methods:

Authors worked collaboratively to review and summarize recent data, collect extension recommendations and organize in a way that would be easy for producers to navigate. Other than a small print run of the final document, no materials were needed.

Objectives and Results:

The objective of this project was to completely revise the outdated national publication “Alfalfa for Beef Cows” including current market conditions and best management practices, updated photographs, and recently published data. These efforts have resulted in a detailed, twelve page publication aimed to illustrate to producers the benefits of alfalfa for beef cattle and how to incorporate it into their operations. This revised publication includes over twenty high resolution, modern photographs and summaries of recently published research data from across the US.

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References: all references are cited in the text of the publication.

Keywords: Alfalfa for beef; alfalfa hay; grazing alfalfa, alfalfa and cool season grass systems; alfalfa and warm season grass systems.