

Feeding alternatives

By JOSH FLINT

EVEN though beef producers have more feed options available, finding and implementing alternatives can be quite the hassle.

For years, corn silage has been the best bet. Paul Walker, Illinois State University, says those days are over.

Now, wet distillers grains and corn gluten feed are the top buys. Both represent the cheapest feeds for total digestible nutrients and crude protein. In both cases, Walker says getting enough nutrients means overfeeding on protein.

"We're really not balancing for protein when we're using these alternative feeds," he adds. "We're looking for the lowest-cost feed."

Current research puts safe DDG inclusion rates at 25% for beef. Walker's research has indicated 35% to 40% inclusion rates are OK. He's currently finishing research on a ration that includes 70% DDG. "At high levels, you could potentially run into sulfur toxicity," Walker adds. He and his team are trying to pinpoint that level.

According to a previous study from Kansas State University, high levels of DDG could result in higher instances of *E. coli* in cattle. Walker notes the research was probably released somewhat prematurely. Subsequent studies from KSU and other institutions have refuted this information.

"It looks like distillers grain [does] not play a role in increasing *E. coli* instances," Walker says.

Another feed alternative some farmers may have forgotten is adding anhydrous

Key Points

- Beef producers have more options with alternative feed.
- Across the board, DDG products vary in quality and consistency.
- Producers find it's necessary to mix alternative feeds evenly.

ammonia to low-quality residue bales, or ammoniating roughage. Walker says it takes approximately three to four weeks for the anhydrous to work its way into the bale, but it can significantly boost the crude protein.

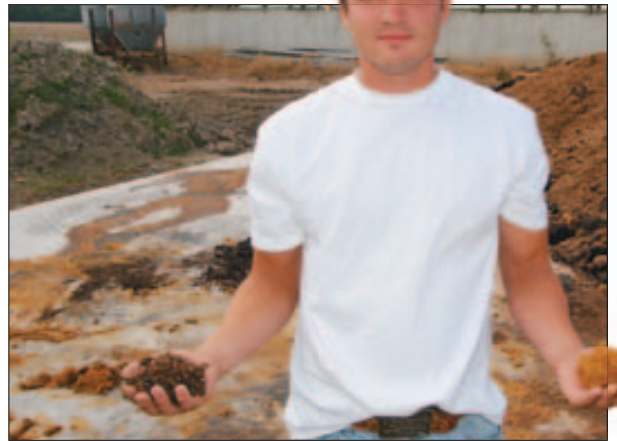
"A word of caution: Do not use it with a high-quality bale," Walker notes. It can result in "crazy cow syndrome." Symptoms include hyper-excitability, circling, convulsions and death. If anhydrous is used on high-quality roughage, such as alfalfa, forage sorghum or hybrid sudan, a toxic compound is formed when soluble sugars in the roughage react with ammonia. Low-quality roughage has low soluble sugar content.

Instituting alternatives

When it comes to substitutes, there's not a whole lot Henry Probst won't try in his cattle's feed ration. Lately, he's been adding powdered Tums, the antacid, to the mix. Henry uses a little to help boost the sugar content.

"Hey, if it saves a little corn, it saves a little corn," he says with a smile. "Plus, they say it's good for acidosis."

Henry and his father, Kurt, finish 800 head on their farm in Stewardson. When corn prices started going up, Henry began looking at alternatives.



CONSISTENTLY INCONSISTENT: Henry Probst says the dried corn gluten (darker) can be burnt during the drying process. Feeding gluten has saved the Probsts money, but takes more time.

"When corn got over \$4, I figured there's got to be a better way to do this," he notes.

He's currently feeding a 70% wet diet, which includes a sizable amount of DDG. He detailed a typical 11,700-pound batch: 4,700 pounds of DDG; 4,500 pounds of dried corn gluten; 2,100 pounds of corn; and 400 pounds of hay.

Traditionally, the Probsts used self-feeders with corn-heavy rations. When Henry first pitched the idea of alternative feed, Kurt wasn't exactly sold on it. "I had my reservations," Kurt notes.

Kurt gave in last year, and the duo began feeding the new ration. At first, Kurt thought it was the wrong decision. "When we switched over, they looked like they fell apart," he recalls.

Up to that point, the two were using the bucket of a front-end loader to mix the feed by hand. Realizing they had to get more serious, they bought a

tub mixer and started preparing the feed in exact proportions. Things started to turn around at that point, Kurt notes. Now the cattle are looking good. However, a lot more work goes into feeding alternatives.

"It's a challenge to get distillers grain the same consistency every time," Kurt says.

However, with the money he is saving, Henry says the extra work of mixing and feeding each load is worth it.

They said it

"We needed some more revenue in rural America, but not this fast. Grain farmers are fearful of what's happening to demand. They are scared grain prices will fall, but input costs will remain high. As one producer said, 'I'm scared of \$7.50 input costs and \$7 corn.'"

Art Lehmann, hog producer

"Pork producers have very high input costs, and their product isn't worth enough. They're getting hit with a double whammy."

Jim Fraley, Farm Bureau

"I cut back my sow herd 5% to adjust for what I had contracts for. It doesn't pay to sell extra hogs on the market right now."

Phil Borgic, IPPA president

"The grain elevators are not opposed to high grain prices. They'd just like to see prices stabilize to alleviate the financial stress."

Jeff Adkisson, Grain and Feed Association of Illinois

"Obviously, those are very valuable contracts right now."

In most cases, contracts protect pork prices from hitting rock bottom.

He thinks the food vs. fuel debate is just getting started. "Right now, consumers are being told there is only 8 cents worth of corn in a box of cornflakes, so they shouldn't blame corn ethanol for the increase in food prices," Art explains. "When the price of meat, milk and eggs doubles, consumers will start looking for answers."

replacement for corn.

"In this area, corn is king and even though it's expensive, I can get it pretty readily," he says.

Wernsing's wife and his lender have asked him if he's ever considered leaving a building empty until things turn around. "I guess I'm optimistic and think if I put hogs in there, I'll come out OK on them."

It's becoming even tougher to lock in corn at a good price, on both sides. As a hog farmer, \$4 corn seemed expensive. Not anymore. "It's getting to the point where we don't know what's a good buy or a bad buy, or a good sell or a bad sell," he notes.

Like the Lehmanns, Wernsing knows a fallout is coming.

Feed prices: Then and now

Feedstuff	2006 Prices			June 2008		
	Price per unit	Price (cents)	TDN (cents/lb.)(CP (cents/lb.))	Price per unit	Price (cents/lb.)(TDN (cents/lb.))	CP (cents/lb.)
Corn	\$2.50/bu	4.46	5.63	\$7/bu	12.50	15.78
Corn silage	\$18.75/ton	0.94	3.35	\$52.50/ton	2.63	9.39
Soybean meal	\$180/ton	9.00	11.76	\$400/ton	20.00	26.14
Soybean hulls	\$70/ton	3.50	6.00	\$140/ton	7.00	12.01
WDGS	\$30/ton	1.50	3.62	\$65/ton	3.25	7.85
DDGS	\$90/ton	4.50	5.68	\$180/ton	9.00	11.36
Corn gluten feed	\$33/ton	1.65	4.23	\$68/ton	3.40	8.71
Dried corn						
gluten feed	\$90/ton	4.50	5.95	\$175/ton	8.75	11.58
Urea	\$400/ton	20.00	N/A	\$800/ton	40.00	N/A
Cobs	\$120/ton	6.00	16.66	\$200/ton	10.00	27.77
Straw	\$70/ton	3.75	10.51	\$100/ton	5.00	14.01
Anhydrous						
ammonia	\$481/ton	24.10	N/A	\$830/ton	41.50	N/A
Hay	\$120/ton	6.00	13.26	\$200/ton	10.00	22.10
Wheat midds	\$73/ton	3.65	5.94	\$140/ton	7.00	11.39

Note: TDN (total digestible nutrients) and CP (crude protein)
SOURCE: ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

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