

Forages and Supplementation for Cattle

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Weather has varied widely across the state during the growing season and consequently impacted pasture and forage availability. Producers may have gaps to fill in their forage inventory either because of quality and/or quantity issues. Others may be in the position of looking for marketing opportunities for surplus supplies.

US ethanol production is currently 88-90% of pre-COVID levels. Kansas ethanol plants are showing strong demand for inputs. Distillers grains are an attractive supplement because they provide both protein and energy and, in some diets, more energy than an equal amount of corn. The balance of protein and energy in distiller's grains and the lack of starch have made distillers a very popular supplement for many classes of cattle.

Energy may be the most limiting nutrient in some forage samples. Thus, higher energy feeds such as corn, wheat midds, soyhulls, wheat bran, and/or corn gluten feed are needed. Corn is not preferred as an energy feedstuff as it can lead to substitution effects (cattle eat less forage – especially if protein is not balanced); however, a general rule of thumb is to feed at less than 0.3% of body weight to avoid the negative impact on fiber digestion. Since the starch in corn is a concern, offering the non-starch energy feeds such as wheat midds, soyhulls, and corn gluten often provides a safer option. A producer can feed higher amounts of these feedstuffs, which is beneficial if there is a severe deficiency in energy in the forage.

It is important to make sure and test the hay you are feeding for both protein and energy values, so that the appropriate supplements can be offered to cattle. Check for nitrates in forage sorghums and sudans as a routine practice. Once a forage analysis has been conducted and an inventory of the available supplements priced, work with a nutritionist and/or K-State Research and Extension professional to help develop a balanced diet for your cattle.

For more information, please contact the local K-State Research and Extension Office. K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.