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(Neb.)-Cornstalk Residue An Opportunity For Corn And Beef Producers



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(Photo courtesy www.beefmagazine.com)

(LINCOLN)-This year's drought has taken a significant toll on grazing land and hay supplies, two critical feed sources for Nebraska's beef producers. As of Sept. 23rd, the U.S. Department of Agriculture said 98 percent of Nebraska's pasture and rangeland is in poor to very poor condition.

"Much of a beef cattle's diet is forage, from calving through finishing, and cow-calf operations rely significantly on range and grazing land," said Jon Holzfafter, a cattle and corn farmer from Paxton, who is a member of the Nebraska Corn Board. "In total, beef cattle achieve 70 percent of their growth on forage, and years like this can dramatically limit hay supplies and raise prices for that forage."

However, Holzfafter noted there are opportunities for corn farmers to work with cattle producers to graze cattle on cornstalk residue left in the field after harvest or take advantage of baled cornstalk residue. Jim Ramm, a cattle producer from Atkinson and president of Nebraska Cattlemen, said cornstalks give cattle producers some much needed fall grazing or supplemental baled forage to stretch supplies.

"We're encouraging cattle producers to consider the opportunity of cornstalk grazing because saving existing stored feedstuffs and hay supplies for winter feed is very important for making it through a drought," Ramm said. "Cornstalk residue can be a good feed when managed properly, and we're fortunate that the University of Nebraska has some great resources available."

Rick Rasby, an Extension beef specialist with the University of Nebraska, said beef experts at the University continue to compile a drought resource webpage for beef producers at beef.unl.edu. Just click on 'Drought' from the left-hand side of that page.

"Fact sheets, feeding recommendations, ammoniating opportunities for crop residue like cornstalks and more, are all collected on that page," Rasby said. "There are also several short videos that discuss using cornstalk bales and links to webinars that provide additional details, ideas, and resources for managing forages during a drought."

One of those webinars, titled "Cornstalk Grazing – Understanding the Values to Cattle Producers and Corn Farmers," is scheduled for Oct. 2nd from 12:30 to 1:10 p.m. Information about the webinar can be found at beef.unl.edu. It will be recorded and made available afterwards for cattle producers and corn farmers who cannot view it live.

The Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) says it is encouraging farmers with available cornstalks to work cooperatively with livestock producers to ensure access to as much quality forage as possible due to the ongoing drought conditions. Hay production, pastures and grasslands have all been greatly reduced as the fall and winter months approach.

"In light of the ongoing drought conditions, I'd like to encourage our farmers and ranchers to work together to ensure as much quality forage as possible is available to our beef cattle herds this fall and winter," said NDA Director Greg Ibach. "The department has created a Hay and Forage Hotline to assist farmers and ranchers in finding hay and forage products, and it is a good starting point for those seeking feedstuffs."

The Hay and Forage Hotline can be found at www.agr.ne.gov. It lists hay and forage, including cornstalks and stover that is available either for sale or by donation. Those looking to list hay, forage, cornstalks and other feed sources such as silage can do so by calling 800-422-6692.

"We collectively appreciate the work by the University, NDA and others to spread the word on the programs, opportunities and partnerships

that can happen not only this year but every year,” Holzfaster said. “Working together is what keeps agriculture strong in Nebraska.”

--Nebraska Corn Board