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News Release

Finding the Economic and Nutritional Balance When Feeding Coproducts

One of the key factors affecting the bottom line for cattle feeders is the increased price of corn. As the cattle industry faces higher input costs, distillers grains are becoming a standard feed ingredient in cattle diets. Distillers grains, corn gluten feed or a combination of both coproducts offer alternatives in pasture and feedlot diets formulated to effectively improve cattle performance and operation profitability.

The ethanol industry plays a prominent role in the cost and availability of corn. As a greater number of producers choose ethanol coproducts over corn many are wondering just how much distillers grain can be fed to cattle.

“We can feed higher levels of coproducts than originally thought but there are some trade-offs,” Dr. Allen Stateler, a Hubbard Feeds beef nutritionist, said. “The bottom line is that it is an economic decision in which we can afford to give up some performance if it results in a lower cost of gain.”

Cattle operators and feedlot managers need to consider several things when choosing between wet or modified distillers grains. Stateler said that it is important to know the nutrient profile of each source of coproduct, as plants can vary greatly in the coproduct produced. Special attention should be paid to sulfur levels. When high sulfur levels are present, a lesser amount of coproduct should be fed in order to avoid potential problems such as depressed feed intake and sulfur induced polioencephalomalacia.

Research has shown that there can be an additive response between corn and distillers grains. Cattle perform better when fed a combination of the two. Corn distillers grains offer high energy and protein levels that improve animal performance.

As corn prices increase, producers are utilizing distillers grains as a replacement for corn rather than as a corn enhancer. When feeding distillers at 20 to 25 percent of the dietary dry matter distillers serves as a protein and energy source. With greater coproduct intake sulfur levels increase and can cause negative metabolic effects.

Stateler suggests that producers look into nutritional supplements to help increase performance and rate of gain in a cost effective manner. As cattle feeders increase the amount of coproducts in their rations proper supplementation is needed to insure the digestive and metabolic health of the animals.

If producers can purchase distillers grains at 80% or less the price of corn the feed cost savings may be great enough that it becomes economically feasible to sacrifice some average daily gain performance.

Coproduct balancers such as GainRite from Hubbard Feeds are formulated specifically for distillers grains and corn gluten feed based diets. GainRite products deliver unique nutrient profiles formulated to complement corn coproducts. The products, for example, balance the calcium/phosphorus ratio and provide the proper levels of trace mineral supplementation to offset higher sulfur loads.

“GainRite is formulated specifically for the unique nutrient requirements of coproduct feeding programs,” Stateler said. “GainRite creates solutions to unique nutrition challenges by offering varying inclusion rates as well as meal and pellet forms. This provides producers with flexibility and cost savings.”

Hubbard Feeds consultants are available to discuss GainRite as part of an efficient distillers feeding program. For more information on distillers feeding programs, visit www.FeedingDistillers.com or contact a Hubbard representative at 1-800-869-7219.