



I.D.E.A. Industry Update - June 4, 2004

*****Grazing Alfalfa Safely and Profitably**

There appears to be a new promising way of grazing cattle safely and efficiently on alfalfa. A new project is underway in Western Canada to prove it can be done in most cattle herds.

"We've been actually working on developing a product that you can put in the drinking water so the cattle can graze on alfalfa and get those great gains without bloating," explained Dr. Merle Olson a professor of microbiology and infectious diseases at the University of Calgary.

Olson is heading trials this summer to show how a new product called 'Alfasure' is working. Grazing cattle on alfalfa has always been problematic because it can lead to the development of a frothy bloat, which often results in the death of some animals.

"Last year we did preliminary studies where we had about 100,000 cow-calf days on alfalfa pastures without any animals developing bloat," described Olson. "We are actually now very confident this is a very safe thing to do."

Alfasure acts as a detergent that destabilizes the foam which causes bloat allowing the air to escape.

Because this product is delivered through the drinking water, producers need to ensure no other water source is available including streams, sloughs or dugouts. This may require some fencing, which also adds an environmentally friendly aspect to this practice.

"Cattle grazing on alfalfa also produce less methane."

Part of this year's study on grazing alfalfa will include monitoring methane emissions from the cattle. Researchers believe cattle grazed on alfalfa will emit less methane per pound of forage consumed due to improved feed efficiency.

Olson says despite the environmental benefits, for producers to adopt the practice they need to see financial benefits. With current market prices, Olson says a producer can make four times the money by grazing and selling the cattle when compared to cutting the alfalfa and selling the hay.

The project this summer will involve 80 farms in Western Canada. Each site will allow herds of 50 to 200 beef cows, calves or yearlings to graze alfalfa while drinking water containing Alfasure. Producers will be supplied with \$1,000 worth of product.

The cost of applying the product to the drinking water averages \$0.15 to \$0.20 per head, per day.

Alfasure is commercially available. *(By Rae Groeneveld; Reprinted in part from the AgExpert Express newsletter by permission of AgExpert Management Software and Farm Credit Canada.)*

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*****Better Feed Barley Analysis Targets More Dollars for Growers**

Analysis of hundreds, if not thousands, of barley samples over the coming months could lead to a new marketing era for Canadian barley producers, says an Alberta barley breeder. In a new project, researchers led by Dr. Jim Helm of Alberta Agriculture Food and Rural Development (AAFRD) are using the samples to build a database of dozens of feed barley quality traits. Using sophisticated equipment known as Near Infrared Reflectance Spectroscopy (NIRS) to scan grain samples, a full analysis of grain quality traits can be made in a matter of minutes. The technology opens the way for farmers to be paid for quality and to be able to market grain according to its quality strengths. Traditionally feed grain values have been based on general physical characteristics such as bushel weight, kernel plumpness and colour. Based on this approach, the difference in value between a light feed barley and a heavy feed barley can be as high as \$10 per tonne. But that difference in value doesn't reflect the true feed value of the grain, says Helm.

"If we take barley off in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, can we assume it has exactly the same protein content?" he asks. "Of course not. For example, in our analysis we've seen crude protein levels in barley range from 6.6 to 19 percent. But the problem is, these grains are often priced by book value."

NIRS has been used extensively for decades to analyze grain samples for breeding and research purposes, but it has not been used commercially to its full potential, says Helm. The project, to be completed over the next three years, could enable farmers to take grain samples to elevators or feed mills equipped with NIRS scanners to obtain a full quality profile of samples.

More about the project and the challenge of getting paid for feed quality is in the new June edition of Western Grains Research Magazine, available on the Western Grains Research Foundation (WGRF) Web site: www.westerngrains.com. (Source: *Agnat, Food Safety Network*)

*****New I.D.E.A. Member**

Welcome to our newest member, Martin Detillieux of Cavalier Agrow Ltd. in Meota Saskatchewan. Martin has been an independent dealer for five years.