

Feeding Cotton Products

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Beef producers need to realize that cotton provides more than fiber for shirts. The cotton plant also provides several important feeds for beef cattle.

Some of the feeds provided by the cotton plant include cottonseed meal, cotton seed, and cotton seed hulls. All of these can easily and safely be included in beef rations.

Cottonseed meal is probably the best known product from the cotton plant. The meal provides an excellent source of protein for cattle. By feeding two pounds or less per head per day, the needs of most classed can have their protein needs met. The exact amount required by the animal will depend on the protein content of the other feeds being consumed by the animals.

In cotton growing areas, whole cottonseeds are a desired product to feed cattle. The seeds have a total digestible nutrient (TDN) content of 96% and almost 24% crude protein. This is higher than shelled corn. The whole cottonseed make an excellent feed, however, because of the high oil content the amount that can be used is limited. The fat in the oil causes a laxative effect if too much is fed.

The general recommendation is to feed three to four pounds per head to stocker cattle and five to six pounds per head for mature animals. Due to potential breeding issues, it is not recommended that whole cotton seed be fed to young growing bulls.

Cottonseed hulls are used by many producers to add bulk to a ration. The hulls are low in protein and energy. Producers needing to limit the intake of concentrates can add cottonseed hulls to the mixture.

Some producers have used gin trash as cattle feed. An analysis shows a desirable nutrient profile. The problem with using gin trash is that the chemicals applied during the production of the cotton are not labeled to allow the use of the residue as cattle feed. This is why gin trash cannot be used as cattle feed.

In summary, the cotton plant provides several good animal feed products. Cottonseed meal, whole cotton seed and cottonseed hulls can effectively be used in cattle feed. For more information on using cotton products as animal feed, contact your local Extension office.