Crop Residues and Co-products for Gestating and Lactating Beef Cows

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Two studies were conducted (gestation and lactation) to evaluate residues and co-products in diets for beef cows. Gestating mature crossbred cows that consumed wheat straw or corn stover as the primary forage during the winter performed similarly during a 75 day feeding study. Weight change, condition score, and calf birth weight were not different. Free choice residue constituted approximately 50% of dry matter intake. Lactating first-calf heifers fed a wheat midds-wheat straw diet compared to a corn silage-alfalfa hay diet also performed similarly in weight change, condition score, calf gains, and rebreeding. These trials indicate that rations balanced to meet nutrient requirements of cows using a variety of crop residues and co-products will produce equal animal performance compared to more conventional feedstuffs.

Feed costs are the most important variable in maintaining beef cows. Each producer must price the residue harvested from the land and consider the manure returned to the land in comparison. While results of these trials support the extensive use of crop residues in beef cow diets, weather stress, age, breed, in-herd cow competition, health, and other factors will affect the diet and management of the herd. Cattlemen must constantly monitor the condition of their cows and make timely adjustments to rations for optimum production.