

# Combining Cows and Crops for More Sustainable Family Farms and Ranches

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**S**pecialize or diversify? That question should be on the minds of every farmer/rancher in the state. The answer lies in the available resources and the potential improvements to the bottom line. Diversifying income sources is one method of managing risk. Considering that much of the state is cropped and beef cows are spread relatively evenly throughout the state, it is not much of a reach to add crop residues and co-products to beef cow diets. Beef cows are fed for 4-6 months each winter anyway. On a state-wide scale, it is possible to double the number of beef cows in North Dakota if we would utilize a larger portion of crop residues (stover and straw) and co-products in cow diets. Rangeland is a finite resource. We can manage grass more carefully, but the feed resources with much greater potential for increasing livestock numbers are residues, co-products and feedgrains. More beef cows and feedlots would add value to underutilized feed resources.

Straw, chaff, and stover are the most abundant residue feeds. Balanced with a few pounds of supplement from grain or co-product feeds, highly cost-competitive rations can be formulated. Data from several trials at the Carrington Research Center proves that beef cows can be fed a wide variety of feedstuffs and perform at their genetic potential. Palatable diets of low cost ingredients balanced to requirements make for economical production. Many North Dakota feedstuffs are undervalued and underutilized. A high percentage of the co-products produced in North Dakota are shipped to other states or countries. How can other livestock operations afford to transport these co-products thousands of miles and still find them economically feasible?

Feed barley is traditionally undervalued and can make a very economical and compatible supplement for high residue beef cow diets. A series of circulars on feeding barley to beef, dairy, sheep, and swine is being published. Nearly 1,000 tons of wheat midds are produced daily at several plants from Minot to Hankinson. Summer prices are very low for this seasonally demand-driven feedstuff. A new NDSU Extension Circular "Wheat Middlings: A Useful Feed for Cattle" (AS1175) is recommended for further reading. Potato waste is less mobile but available in huge amounts throughout the year. Screenings of all kinds are produced and sold at salvaged prices. Barley malt pellets from two very large malt houses are an excellent feed. These and other co-product feeds are described in more detail in an NDSU Extension Circular "Alternative Feeds for Ruminants" (AS-1182).

Limited grazing land, the wide variety of useful low-cost feedstuffs, and the management skills of our cattle producers provide the basis for more integrated crop/livestock operations. Efficient and economical use of these resources can result in sustainable and profitable farms. Specialized farms worked at one time. Diversification seems to be a more logical approach now.