Date: Mon, 24 Sep 2012 22:26:17 +0000
To: CSU Beef Leadership Team <CSU_Beef_Team@colostate.edu>
Subject: [CSU_BEEF_TEAM:363] Article by Bruce Fickenscher on Nitrate Testing - a big issue right now in our state

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: **All for the Cost of a Test!**

So feed is short and your livestock are hungry. You either bought some feed or harvested some from your own property (alfalfa, sorghum, weeds, etc.). It is time to break into the stack and feed your livestock. The next day you go out and some of your herd is staggering around like they have been on an all-night bender or (worst case scenario) several of your animals are already in the happy pastureland. Did you have your feed tested for nitrates or other toxic compounds? Because of the drought conditions this year, immature crops that have been stressed or dried out due to drought prior to reaching plant maturity may have a high concentration of nitrates and/or prussic acid. Without testing, sudden death of animals is usually the first sign of a problem.

Scenario 2: You have been feeding for a month or so, but your livestock just do not seem to be gaining Body Condition like you expected or wanted. You are feeding the same variety of feed you have always fed, but this year it just did not get the usual amount of growth. Have you ever had a nutrient analysis done on your feed to balance your animals ration with its needs?

According to the Agriculture Marketing Service, hay prices in Southeast Colorado are running upwards of $200 per ton for good quality, corn is bringing $7 to $8 per bushel, and $400 to $600 per ton of protein supplement. Add to this that cows are bringing in the $1000 range and calves in at $500 to $800 (give or take).

Given all of these factors, livestock producers are encouraged to have their feed sources tested, either for nutrient content, the presence of nitrates, or both. For a relatively small cost of approximately $20.00 including shipping and handling, a nutrient analysis can be done. A nitrate test will run around $10.00. Looks like pretty cheap insurance! From these tests your local CSU Extension Office can help you balance a ration to fit the physiological stage of the specific class of your livestock.

For more specific information on the nutritional status of your herd, the Grazing Animal Nutrition Lab at Texas A&M offers the NUTBAL test. For a cost of $35 plus shipping and handling, a fecal sample from your herd is submitted to determine the nutritional status of grazed forages. From this test it can be determined what you need to do to balance your animals ration. More information may be obtained by going to http://cnrit.tamu.edu/ganlab/pagesmith/7. From past experience, energy is more of a limiting factor in most livestock rations, not protein, and usually more economical to supplement.