



**This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/FeedingSilagetoCalves>

Note to editors: A photo to accompany this story is at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ksrecomm/53545679504>

Released: March 5, 2024

Cattle Chat: Feeding silage to calves

K-State veterinarians offer insight into why some calves have an aversion to silage

By Lisa Moser, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — When working with animals, often their caretakers have to use clues to understand what might be leading that individual to react differently than expected. And with feed resources, the experts at the Kansas State University Beef Cattle Institute recommend slowly changing feeds, especially when introducing silage.

In answering a listener's question about why calves were not willing to eat silage, the [Cattle Chat](#) podcast experts suggested following the cues of the cattle.

“When introducing silage, you are going to have to watch the calves closely to know when you can start increasing the amount in the diet. And with some groups, you may need to move more slowly,” said K-State veterinarian Bob Larson.

One reason that calves might have an aversion to eating silage is its smell, beef cattle nutritionist Phillip Lancaster.

“Silage is a fermented feed resource, so it has a different taste and smell than calves are used to,” Lancaster said. “To make the silage more palatable, producers can add silage to the top of a feed source that the calves like. That way the calves have to work through the silage to get to what they prefer to eat.”

Because it is a fermented product, there can be variability in the batches, Lancaster said.

“If it is too wet, then it has a butyric fermentation that gives it a nasty odor that really turns cattle off on eating it,” Lancaster said. “If it is too dry, it can be moldy.”

Lancaster recommends that producers take a sample of the silage and have a fermentation analysis done to make sure there is the right balance of acetic acid, lactic acid and butyric acid.

He also said silage inoculates added at the time the silage is made can provide bacteria at a high enough concentration to get an optimum fermentation.

If cattle are inconsistent in their willingness to eat the silage, K-State veterinarian Brian Lubbers said it is important for producers to take and store samples as they work through the feed so when they go off feed they can pull the appropriate sample to test.

“There are microclimates within a silage pit, and so take the samples as you are feeding so that you have a representative sample to help you figure out what is actually causing them to stop eating the silage,” Lubbers said.

To hear the full discussion, listen to the [Cattle Chat](#) podcast on your preferred streaming platform.

-30-

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story Beef Cattle Institute Cattle Chat podcast, <https://ksre-learn.com/CattleChatFeedingSilagetoHeifers>

K-State Research and Extension is a short name for the Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, a program designed to generate and distribute useful knowledge for the well-being of Kansans. Supported by county, state, federal and private funds, the program has county extension offices, experiment fields, area extension offices and regional research centers statewide. Its headquarters is on the K-State campus in Manhattan. For more information, visit www.ksre.ksu.edu. K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Story by:

Lisa Moser
785-532-2010
lmoser@ksu.edu

More information:

Bob Larson
785-532-4257
rlarson@vet.k-state.edu

Phillip Lancaster
785-532-6323
palancaster@vet.k-state.edu

Brian Lubbers
785-532-4012
blubbers@vet.k-state.edu