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## GRAZING CORN STALKS CAN CUT FEED COSTS

*James B. Neel*  
*Professor*  
*Department of Animal Science*

Utilizing corn crop residue is one way that feed costs of cow-calf enterprises can be reduced. Crop residue-primarily, corn stalk fields, is one of the least-used feed resources in Tennessee, even though it can be an excellent source of feed for beef cows and save money typically spent on hay and wintering costs.

In a Nebraska study, an acre of stalk fields had a total of 6,780 lb. of dry matter, including 5% corn grain, 21% cobs, 41% leaves and husks, and 33% stalks. Although this will vary by the planted population, harvesting equipment, and the grain yield, it is safe to assume about two-thirds of the field will be usable cattle feed.

Carrying capacity of an acre of stalk fields is about 45 days for the average cow. This may be less for larger cows. More effective use of the field can be made if 1/4 acre per cow is allowed the first week and an additional 1/4 acre is added each week. Cows will eat the best material first and the rest later, so condensing grazing will force them to use all of the material on the field. Portable electric fencing such as polywire is very useful.

Very few nutrients are taken from the field by the cow. Nebraska workers found that a cow gaining 80 lb. on a stalk field will take only 3/4 lb. of actual nitrogen from the field. Most is returned to the field as feces and urine.

Stalk fields are nutritionally adequate for most mature beef cows in mid-pregnancy. Young animals or cows calving early in the winter would require about 1/2 lb. of additional protein in the diet per head daily.