

Fowler Seed Marketing

Serving your Seed & Soil Fertility Needs Since 1995

Forages for Grass Finishing Beef



Every day that a beef animal is on feed costs money. Twenty 1000 pound animals will consume an average round bale every day (30 pounds of dry matter). A significant portion of the energy consumed on a daily basis goes to maintenance, more when temperatures are cold.

To successfully finish beef cattle on forage, it is necessary to understand three things:

- Time is your enemy
- Digestible energy drives gain
- Dry matter intake limits gain

Only the excess energy beyond maintenance is used for growth. To put 400 pounds on a finishing animal in 7 months requires an average daily gain of 2.0 pounds per day. To maintain carcass desirability, the animal has to reach physiological maturity between 18 and 30 months.

At 6% interest, it costs about \$4.60 per month to finance a finishing animal.

Therefore, constant availability of energy-dense forages is the key to producing an acceptable grass finished animal in a profitable time frame.

Forages capable of supporting the daily energy requirements of finishing beef cattle are generally limited to improved varieties of selected cool-season grasses, forage-type small grains, BMR sorghums and forage brassicas.

Combinations of Italian ryegrass, perennial ryegrass, soft-leaved tall fescue and meadow fescue work best for multi-year pasture and hay fields. **FSM Brand HQ-F** contains the best available

varieties of these species from **Barenbrug** (the world's largest grass seed company).

When adequately fed and properly managed, cool-season grasses can provide the quality pasture and hay basis for grass finishing beef. Both spring and fall planted forage

oats and triticale are quick potential sources of high-yielding, energy-dense forage.

FSM Brand Banquet forage oats can be planted in spring typically for balage or in late summer with either **Barkant** turnips or **T-raptor** rape as fall and early winter grazing.

Trical brand Flex 719 triticale can also be planted in spring or early fall for spring grazing or harvest. These forage small grain products respond both in yield and energy content to our **AgriEnergy Solutions Bio-Enhanced Small Grain Fertility Program**.



An energy boosting fertility program is especially important on small grain forages to maximize digestible carbohydrate production and maintain plant health, essential characteristics for high-quality small grain forage. Brown Mid-Rib (BMR) forage sorghum [**FSM Brand Silo Candy PS**] or BMR sorghum-sudan [**FSM Brand Cow Candy II BMR**] can be planted as soon as soils reach 65 degrees F.

Silo Candy PS is best-suited as a one-cut high energy silage or balage. It will typically out-perform late planted corn silage in yield and has tested off-the-chart in energy (**.76 NE-m, .48 NE-g**) even without any grain content! Likewise, **Cow Candy II BMR** produces similar energy levels in a two-cut balage or grazing system.

One acre of **Cow Candy II**, alone or underseeded with a brassica, can feed twenty 1000 pound animals for about 10 days as an energy-rich drought-hedge for mid to late summer.

Producing enough high-energy forage to grass finish beef is a challenged that can cost-effectively be fulfilled by the synergy of modern forage genetics fed with a balanced, quality enhancing forage fertility program.

Having a workable, comprehensive forage plan that maximizes utilization of lower cost grazing options while being prepared for weather contingencies is necessary to turn theory into profitable practice.

If you're planning to grass-finish beef, put this phrase where you see it regularly, "**Full-feed, every day**".



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If perennial pasture is part of the system, observe the following

- Only graze when the soil is dry enough to minimize compaction
- Only graze when the sward has adequate growth
- Only graze finishing stock when the quality is sufficient for animal growth.

Likewise, with pasturing annuals, apply these principles:

- Limit access to what can be consumed in a day to minimize waste
- Only graze when soil conditions allow
- Only graze finishing stock when the forage quality is sufficient for growth

Be prepared to utilize high-energy stored feed when it's too wet, too short or too old to graze.

Keep some moderate quality hay on-hand to mitigate protein-rich forages by slowing the rate of passage and improving nutrient absorption.

Begin to think of a plant nutrition program as a system building tool rather than a switch to be flipped when forage is short. Typical dry fertilizer programs may stimulate short-term visible results but can create detrimental nutrient imbalances and shock both the plant and soil, creating opportunity for disease.

Our Agri-Energy Bio-Enhanced Forage Fertility programs are field-proven to increase season long yield, documented to significantly increase forage quality, and observed to improve both plant and soil health.

Take the time to have the forage analyzed. Only feed pasture or stored feed with adequate digestible energy for growth to finishing animals. Be prepared for drought and excessive rain in the summer.

Use shade and water to minimize 'recreational damage' to pastures and maximize daytime consumption of stored feed in the summer.



Encourage evening and nighttime grazing to maximize intake. Consider means of improving winter efficiency by reducing exposure to precipitation and mud in the winter.

In short, profitable, timely beef finishing without grain is possible but requires full-feed of high-energy forages every day regardless of the weather.