

IMPROVED PASTURES PRODUCE 2 AND 1/2 TIMES AS MUCH BEEF

Pastures renovated by introducing improved grasses and legumes have produced nearly three times as much beef per acre as unimproved bluegrass pastures during the past 4 years in tests at Iowa State University's pasture improvement farm near Albia.

Extension Agronomist Dwayne Rohweder says that improved birdsfoot trefoil pastures produced two to two and one-half times as much beef as unimproved bluegrass pastures. He said that birdsfoot trefoil increased pasture yields with out the bloat hazard which occurs when pasturing most legumes.

This opens new opportunities for profitable soil conservation and soil restoration through southern Iowa, says Rohweder. He points out that there are more than 1 1/2 million pasture acres in southern Iowa. Renovation would sharply increase returns from many of these acres. Rohweder says pasture renovation not only increase returns in livestock production, but soil fertility is restored in many cases so that some of the pasture might go into crop rotations of 5 to 6 years meadow-oats-corn.

Renovated alfalfa, grazed rotationally,

tripled the beef yields on unimproved bluegrass and out-yielded the birdsfoot trefoil. Rohweder emphasizes that with the higher yields with alfalfa pastures there is also the bloat hazard. He says that in many cases the bloat hazard makes alfalfa impractical as a pasture crop for beef cattle.

Alfalfa-grass pastures are still the top pastures for dairy cattle. Bloat is usually not as great a hazard for these cattle because the cattle receive dry feed before being turned on pasture each day.

Rotational grazing on improved alfalfa pastures increased beef production by 83 pounds per acre above continuously grazed pastures. The 4 year tests show consistent benefits in giving alfalfa plants a period of recovery, he says. These pastures were divided into four equal areas by electric fences. The cattle were allowed to graze in one lot for a week, then they were moved to the second lot. Each pasture lot was given a 3-week recovery period between grazings. After 3 years of grazing, the rotational pastures had nearly twice as many plants per square foot as did the continuously grazed pastures.