Field peas considered for dairy cows

Researchers look at impact the change in diet would have

By BRIAN WITTE
Associated Press Writer

Researchers say field peas could make a good meal for dairy cows.

Field peas have been used as a grain substitute in dairy cows in Canada, but they have not yet caught on in North Dakota, largely because farmers could not find enough of them.

Researchers say that is changing.

"I think we've made some big strides as far as availability, as far as the commodity itself, with acres now slowly rising in the state," said Kent McKay, agronomist at the North-Central Research Extension Center in Minot.

McKay said farmers in 47 of North Dakota's 53 counties are raising peas.

"So they're well adapted statewide, from the northeast to the southwest," he said.

Field pea acreage might rise another 30 percent this year to more than 100,000 acres, McKay said. One of the reasons is that peas fit well into crop rotations.

"We need to diversify, and peas fit that," McKay said.

Doug Dukart, a board member of the Milk Producers Association of North Dakota, said if the price is right, peas could be beneficial to dairy farmers.

"The important part is, is it cost effective?" he said. "Can it be produced or delivered to the farm at a reasonable price so that the dairy farmer can convert it into milk and make some money?"

Field peas could be a good substitute when other feed is more expensive, said J.W. Schroeder, an extension dairy specialist at North Dakota State University.

Field peas have been more expensive, but the cost has been coming down as the crop has become more plentiful, he said.

"(The cost) hasn't been as high as what we saw five, six or seven years ago," Schroeder said.

North Dakota dairy producers have come to rely on soybeans to feed their cows.

"We need to do more research to look at field peas and how does it compare to soybeans and some other sources such as canola meal, which is another one that's emerging in this area," Schroeder said.

He cautioned that changes to diet cannot be made overnight.

"People like to think in terms of a direct substitution, and that's hard to do because each feed has its own energy and protein value," Schroeder said. High-producing dairy cattle are finely tuned instruments, and you want to do things carefully.

Area farmers hear value of field peas in livestock diets

By MELISSA SMITH
Regional Reporter

ALLIANCE — A dry pea marketer told area producers Wednesday there is much to gain from incorporating field peas into livestock diets, an idea that is just beginning to take hold in the United States.

North Dakota Dry Pea and Lentil Association Marketing Director Holly Cline said field peas are being fed to swine, poultry, beef and dairy animals in Canada and Europe, whereas the U.S. is just beginning to see the values in the product.

"Field peas are undeniably a valuable feed," she said. "It's my job to get out there and let people know about their value."

For one, she said, the crop is nutrient dense, containing calcium, phosphorus and high levels of crude protein, eliminating the need for those supplements. Also, she said, field peas provide good energy from starch and digestible fiber, measuring up to and even more than other products, such as corn.

Compared to other feed, field peas provide the same nutrition in lesser amounts of products and result in good carcass traits, giving producers more return for their money, she said.

In addition, field peas can be used as forage, planted with a cereal crop such as oats or barley.

"Peas make an excellent rotational crop," she said. "If you can grow it, I'll sell it for you. The interest and demand for peas is increasing."

Cline made the presentation during the High Plains Dry Pea Growers Association meeting at the Eagles Club in Alliance.