



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

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### **Cattle Chat: Strategy for increasing feed efficiency for cows**

K-State beef cattle experts say that adding ionophores to the diet is beneficial for digestion

*[By Lisa Moser](#), K-State Research and Extension news service*

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Many people add such supplements as vitamins, minerals, probiotics and botanicals to their diet for a variety of reasons, but often it is to maintain or improve their health.

Feed additives are also incorporated in cattle diets with a similar end goal, say the experts at the Kansas State University's Beef Cattle Institute.

Speaking on a recent [Cattle Chat](#) podcast, the experts said that adding an ionophore to the cow's diet is beneficial for her feed efficiency. Ionophores are antibiotics that target bacteria and protozoa in the rumen.

"Ionophores change the rumen microbial population, so the animal has a more efficient fermentation of carbohydrates, and that helps improve the feed efficiency of those animals," K-State beef cattle nutritionist Phillip Lancaster said.

When beef producers consider incorporating ionophores, more typically they are added to the rations of feeder calves, Lancaster said, adding that it does have some benefits for cows that are being fed a grain mix in the winter months to maintain or increase their body condition.

"If you are already feeding a grain and protein mix, then adding ionophores makes sense because it will increase the feed efficiency," Lancaster said.

He added that producers are adding an expense to the budget when they offer grain to the cows, so feeding ionophores can maximize the value of the investment.

However, for producers whose cows are in good body condition, they likely won't need to be supplemented with grain and therefore feeding an ionophore may incur additional expense, according to Lancaster.

“Because of the cost of this supplement, the benefit of feeding the ionophore may not outweigh the cost for cows who don’t otherwise need to be fed a grain mix,” Lancaster said.

For producers who opt to incorporate ionophores into the diet, K-State veterinarian Brian Lubbers cautions them to make sure they are feeding the appropriate amount due to the health implications of overconsumption.

“There are toxicity issues with ionophores and if cattle get too much it can kill them, so make sure if you are adding them to the grain mix on the farm or have that batch prepared at the feed mill that the right amount of ionophores are included,” Lubbers said. “Because if you get off a decimal place when calculating the amount, it can have drastic consequences.”

He also had an additional caution for beef cattle producers who maintain horses.

“Horses are extremely sensitive to the toxic effects of an ionophore; even the amount that is safe for cattle will kill horses,” Lubbers said. “While deaths relating to ionophores are rare, when they happen, they can be significant to that operation.”

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

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**FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS:** Links used in this story

Beef Cattle Institute Cattle Chat podcast, <https://ksre-learn.com/cattle-chat-feeding-ionophores>

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