

TESTIMONIAL

AWARD-WINNING BEEF PRODUCER COUNTS ON BYRON SEEDS TO REACH FORAGE AND HERD PRODUCTION GOALS



*Illinois Beef Association Commercial
Producer of 2010*

Todd Slykhuis, manager of Slykhuis Farms in Raleigh, Ill., knows how to produce beef cattle. In fact, his success led the the Illinois Beef Association to name him Commercial Producer of the Year in 2010. The Beef Improvement

Federation nominated him for Commercial Producer of the Year honors in 2012.

According to BIF, the award is presented to progressive, performance-oriented commercial cow-calf producers who utilize the latest in breeding, management and forage production to optimize the production and profitability of their operation.

Slykhuis Farms was founded by Todd's father, Charles, and mother, Virginia, in 1972 with the purchase of 392 acres and 100 cows. Today, the operation includes about 400 Angus and SimAngus cross cows with 75 to 100 replacement heifers. Slykhuis recently added a 299-head finishing barn and finishes his calves indoors.

Slykhuis runs his cows, their calves and the replacements on 350 acres. "I'm plenty crowded," he admits. "I have to maximize forage that I get off the pastures." He also raises the corn for his beef finishing operation.

Calves are born in January/February with the intention of finishing them by the time the cow calves again the following January.

"We're a self-contained operation," Slykhuis explains. "I feed corn and haylage off the farm. Our aim is to have them finish out around 1,300 pounds at 12 months."

Slykhuis says the keys to his success as a beef producer are good genetics and good management. The good genetics help him reach his 1,300 to 1,400 pound goal and good management keeps his brood cows in top shape. "My biggest thing is trying to keep condition on the mamas," he says.

Slykhuis worked with Ernest (Ernie) Weaver, Byron Seeds Southwest Territory Manager, to develop a forage production plan that includes improved tall fescue grasses. Slykhuis says he respects the fact that Weaver is a farmer as well as a seeds man. "Ernie said that I'd get 10 years out of my fescue pasture, just like he did."

"We are getting more tonnage and higher quality out of our improved fescue than we would out of alfalfa."

To estimate the productivity of his forage fields, Weaver advised Slykhuis to place

a 10-square-foot frame in the pastures. Weaver told him, "If you can find a square foot of bare soil inside that framework, you're losing 10 percent of your field's efficiency to produce beef." Slykhuis says, "With the overstocking that I do on my pastures, I can't afford to have only 15 acres producing grass in a 20-acre field."

Along with yield and quality, durability is important factor when Slykhuis considers what to plant. "I want things that will last a long time."



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Programmed for Success

“Our pastures are a mixture of Drover and Baroptima tall fescues from Byron Seeds,” Slykhuis says. “Fescue works really well for us. We are getting more tonnage and higher quality out of our improved fescue than we would out of alfalfa.

“My crude protein is around 24 percent with total digestible nutrition (TDN) of more than 70 percent and relative feed quality (RFQ) of about 170,” he details.

Good Management Is Key

“Down here in Southern Illinois, it’s hard to keep cool season grasses in a hayfield or pasture without proper management,” Slykhuis says. “I pull the cows off the grass about the first of August and feed them haylage and let them browse on crop residue until the fall rains kick in. I’ll stockpile fescue in some of the pastures until about Thanksgiving. Then I’ll graze it into the new year. This helps me keep top condition on the mamma cows.”

Is Change Necessarily Progress?

Slykhuis laments the fact that many diversified crop and livestock farms in his area have gone strictly to row crops.

“Guys around here are tearing out the fences and selling off their cattle,” Slykhuis says. “They think they’d be better off somehow with a corn/bean rotation just because it’s easier. This country would be a lot better off if part of our teens’ required education was helping with the haying in their local farming community. Kind of like a boot camp, teaching them self-respect and worth.”

Slykhuis follows a careful fertilizer management plan for both his hay fields and pasture. “I put 40 units of actual N on in the spring and then again after every cutting. And I make sure that I cut the stand at least 3 inches high because the reserve for the regrowth is in the crown, or the lowest 3 inches of the stem.”

Slykhuis wraps the haylage at about 60 percent to 65 percent moisture. “It’s just a whole lot easier wrapping hay than trying to dry it, and I get a lot better quality too.”

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