

# ONA REPORTS

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## **A Good Environment Depends on Cattle**

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Some environmentalists have proposed that cattle be eliminated as a farm animal to save the world environment. This proposal is very shortsighted because of their lack of understanding the role cattle play in maintaining the ecological balance.

One essential role of cattle in our complex world is as a living waste disposal system. Cattle will eat and grow when fed almost any waste product of food and fiber production. Only cattle can utilize these wastes in any quantity. Because these wastes are utilized they are thus termed by-product feeds. If they were not utilized they would truly be wastes and their disposal would be an environmental nightmare.

At one time two by-product feeds now produced in large quantities in Florida were true waste problems. These by-product feeds are citrus pulp and sugarcane molasses.

Back in the 1930s and 1940s citrus pulp and excess citrus fruit had no market value. Both were simply dumped any place possible as a method of disposal. Research studies conducted at the Ona Research Center and other IFAS units in the 1940s demonstrated that both wet citrus pulp and excess fruit could be successfully fed to cattle.

After it became evident that citrus pulp was an excellent cattle feed, methods were developed to remove the water to process dried citrus pulp. Further studies at Ona and other IFAS units showed that dried citrus pulp was even a better feed than wet pulp. Today, dried citrus pulp is recognized for its superior feed value and that produced in Florida is shipped around the world.

The use of research to improve and demonstrate the value of cane molasses as a feed for cattle is a similar success story. Working closely with U.S. Sugar Corporation studies conducted at University of Florida, IFAS units at Ona and at Belle Glade in the 1940s and 1950s showed that molasses was an excellent supplement for grazing cattle. Molasses supplements were subsequently improved in the 1930s by adding urea, minerals and vitamins. Molasses supplements were further improved by adding natural protein to form a slurry. Today, about 65 percent of the cattle in south Florida are fed molasses-based supplements.

Because of cattle, and research with them, many products once a waste problem are now valuable by-product feeds. Two potential waste products currently being researched at Ona include hydrolyzed feather meal, made from poultry feathers, and yellow grease, a waste product of the fast food and restaurant industry. What must be realized is that the elimination of cattle which consume many waste products would result in both an economical and an environmental disaster of world proportions.