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Products for the Small Farm

Immuno-Boost™: A Livestock Feed Supplement

On-Farm Research by Kelly Klober

We are taking a slightly different approach with “Products for the Small Farm” this month. We recently received this article which exemplifies the type of on-farm research we encourage our readers to practice. It, however, is also about a very specific commercial product. For this reason, we decided to place it here, where it can serve both as a company promotion and learning tool. If our readers approve, we may continue to do this from time to time with other products.-ed.

I believe that the greatest challenge to optimal production is not genetic but nutritional. Just as performance from an engine begins to falter when octane levels decline, a failure to meet a bird's or animal's needs all across the nutritional spectrum will its performance to falter.

To further complicate matters, there is the question of whether a bird's or animal's vitamin and mineral needs have been fully documented. As the reliance on vegetable protein

sources increase, are we cutting the creatures in our care off from nutrients that they might have received with the feeding of tankage or meat scraps. I can recall old pictures of cows chewing on bones in response to mineral deficiencies. One needs to only survey the rooting activities as a single pig in a garden to see that when left to their own resources, animals seek a wide variety of nutritional components.

Observations of animals on rangelands have shown that animals choose plants in accordance with their nutritional needs. Does anyone really know the nutritional value of insects in poultry diets, the role grubs in the diet of mast feed hog (hogs free ranging in forests), or the full value of forbs (woody Plants) in the diet of browsers.

The pursuit of various ration components has forced farmers to tolerate feed salesman, read even the smallest print on feed tags, and pursue rumors about the shop behind the old stockyards that sells a powdered mix that jump starts performance. Here at Willow Valley, I have tried more than my fair share of products ranging from an early probiotic that was sprinkled on sow rations to adding red cider vinegar to the drinking water of rabbits.

To be useful on a farm, a nutritional product has to be palatable to various species, be easy to store, be simple to use, and improve health and performance at a cost effective level. A group of products that I have long studied originate from our seas, seaweed and fish by-products. Early American history tells us of cattle going to the seashores to browse upon washed up seaweed, farmers feeding salt or marsh grass hay, and hogs actually grazing in the surf. Many

island nations such as New Zealand, Ireland, England, and the coastal areas of France utilize the sea's resources and are internationally known for the quality of their livestock.

This past spring and summer we experimented with a product heavy in the nutrient riches of the sea with rabbits, chickens, ducks, hogs, and even dogs. Our product of Choice was Immuno-Boost, a synergistic blend of seaweed, fish, enzymes, plus an array of other natural compounds, from a Texas company called Innovators LLC. Immuno—Boost is a second generation water soluble vitamin and trace mineral supplement which can be added to the feed, water, or both. Our results, although anecdotal, revealed a product that enhanced animal health and performance and fits any style of small farm management.

With our hogs, we used Immuno-Boost in the drinking water and blended it into the rations of individual sows. It was a rebuilding year in our swine program and the results with our sows has to be considered incomplete. It was obvious that the Immuno-Boost help to maintain sow condition while nursing and fostered quick breed back following weaning. We gave 2 cc's by mouth to newborn pigs in place of our iron shots with good results. When

added to the drinking water of newly weaned pigs, it seemed to combat the growth setback normally encountered. We wean at 35 days of age and by day 56 we had some of the heaviest pigs ever produced here.

When added in the drinking water of our ducks and poultry, palatability was no problem, even with the drastic color change of the water. I did considerable amount of reconfiguration in the chicken breeding pens throughout the season, but reproduction remained quite respectable for the brown egg laying purebreds raised here. The white Pekin ducks laid quite well, continuing through the hotter weather. Two hens took to the nest three times during the season. This was remarkable considering this was one of the hottest and wettest summers on record!

The vitamin/electrolyte product we normally give the rabbits was replaced with Immuno-Boost. One

remarkable doe kindled and reared 21 bunnies in just two litters! This figure is more than one-half of the yearly production that we seek from individual does in our simple facilities. Our average litter size, before using Immuno-Boost, was seven. This year, while using this product, we averaged nine per litter, almost a 29% increase. The rabbits also seemed to be able to tolerate our extended periods of heat.

The positive results that we saw with different farm animals has encouraged us to continue the use of Immuno-Boost. There is a temptation to use it only periodically, during periods of stress or as a tonicing product (used orally, it helped two ailing pigs and one of my father-in-law's foxhound puppies that had gone off feed), but it should be used year-round for maximizing health and performance. It certainly avails itself to the natural, sustainable, and very individualized approaches of modern small farmers.