

Jody G. Holthaus
District Extension Agent
Livestock and Natural Resources

Magic Potions

I've been inundated with friends trying to get me to buy their magic drink. Guaranteed to make me feel better, have more energy and lose weight. I'm happy it's working for them. But what if you had such magic for cattle? It's guaranteed to make them feel better, use their energy to gain more weight. While we're at it, lets add prevent some bad parasites, and keep them from bloating.

You may think I've been drinking the Kool-Aid of some animal pharmaceutical company. Ionophores were discovered in 1950 and first used to prevent coccidiosis. They change the microbes of the rumen, helping cattle use the feed more efficiently and aid in body weight gain. I've seen study after study, they cost pennies a day to feed and pack the pounds on. Ionophores turn the positive charged grams into negative grams, which helps the rumen digest more feed, to put it very simple. There's no GMO or hormones so no fear mongering here! Dr Chris Reinhardt our former KSU Feedlot Specialist said: Ionophores can be added in small amounts to feed rations in several ways, including in the form of cubes, blocks and as part of a mineral supplement.

Producers need to keep in mind that Rumensin is approved for cows and only Bovatec is approved for free choice.

In general, ionophores enhance absorption of nitrogen, magnesium, phosphorus, zinc and selenium. Feed efficiency is improved because ionophores increase capture of feed energy during rumen fermentation with less methane produced. Because of increased energy retention during rumen fermentation, animal performance improves.

Ionophores reduce incidence of coccidiosis, acidosis and bloat. Reduction of these stressors also aids animal performance.

A local expert or veterinarian can assist producers in assessing the optimal form of ionophores that suits their operation and help determine how much to use.

Ionophores are very inexpensive. On average, it costs about two cents per cow per day to use them. If you consider that a cow eats about 20 pounds of forage per day and consumes a ton of forage over a 100-day period, you can save about 10 percent of that ton. If hay costs are at \$130 a ton, you save about \$13 per cow over the winter. Even in a small herd that's a significant savings."

In addition to improving feed efficiency, ionophores have been shown to increase rate of gain by 2 to 7 percent and do not impact carcass characteristics.