

Different forage affects beef cattle weight, taste

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Researchers Jason Schmidt, left, and John Andrae examine chickpea, one of the forages they tested for cattle weight gain and taste. Credit: Peter Kent/Clemson University

Cattle are what they eat. The forage—grasses and other plants—beef cattle eat affects the nutrition and tastiness of the meat. Clemson University animal science researchers report that steers grazing on one of five forages kept in paddocks showed significant differences in growth, carcass and meat quality.

The research can help [cattle producers](#) with alternatives to corn and feed when they are looking to add weight and value to their animals prior to sale.

A team of researchers supported by the Clemson University Experiment Station, Extension Service and College of Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences conducted a two-year experiment feeding Angus steers enclosed in five-acre lots planted with alfalfa, [bermuda grass](#), chicory, cowpea or pearl millet. They reported their findings in the *Journal of the American Society of Animal Science*.

"Finishing steers on alfalfa and chicory during summer increased steer performance," they wrote in the journal article. The report also stated that finishing on legumes (alfalfa and cowpea) increased carcass quality, and in taste tests consumers preferred the flavor of the meat. Finishing on bermuda grass and pearl millet improved the levels of healthy [fatty acids](#) that may reduce cancer risks.

The coauthors of the study are John Andrae, Susan Duckett and Steve Ellis, and Maggie Miller and Jason Schmidt, who were graduate students working on the research.

"The study is useful to beef producers in the Southeast, where summer heat is a challenge for finishing cattle" said Andrae, a forage and pasture specialist. "These forages have potential to boost steer growth and quality when traditional cool-season forages are either dormant or have slow growth rates and don't do as good a job finishing cattle for market."

Provided by Clemson University

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