

Seaweed Fights Disease

Feeding your cattle a particular type of this ocean plant can help decrease the incidence of E. coli infections in humans.

From Staff Reports

Feeding a particular seaweed to cattle in their last two weeks of life greatly reduces deadly E. coli O157:H7 in their beef. Texas Tech and Virginia Tech researchers found that the seaweed, a brown one harvested in the Bay of Fundy and sold under the trade name Tasco, cuts the incidence of the deadly bacteria by 300%.



Tasco, a brown seaweed harvested in the Bay of Fundy, cuts E. coli threefold if fed to cattle in the last two weeks prior to slaughter. PHOTO: Vann Cleveland

Kevin Pond, a Texas Tech animal and food scientist, says Tasco is one of the first natural compounds that demonstrates the ability to improve food safety. The university also tried other compounds, including the bacteria found in yogurt, but the seaweed was most effective.

Feeding Tasco may join postharvest techniques such as rinsing carcasses with hot water and mild organic acids, as well as cold pasteurization, to cut the risk of humans becoming ill from eating beef infected with E. coli. Feedlots and at least one branded-beef program are seriously considering feeding the seaweed to their cattle.

"This has the potential to bring a whole new element of safety to the product," explains John Butler, president of Ranchers Renaissance, a branded-beef supply chain based at Parker, Colo. He is considering adding Tasco as a critical control point for safety.

Robert Carter of C-Bar Feedyard at Plainview, Texas, also may use the product at his operation. "We plan to do another study with Texas Tech to refine the way we deliver the product to cattle," he adds.

Vivien Allen, a Texas Tech plant and soil scientist, is the lead researcher on the seaweed project. "If our research prevents even one untimely death, it's all been worthwhile," she says.

For more information, visit the Web site at www.tasco.ca.