



HOW NOW
GREEN COW

THE SUSTAINABLE COW

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The cow is a champion converter. Like the bison before it, cattle take a resource that is a direct product of the sun's energy in the form of grass, and convert it into a product that we can use in the form of meat. We cannot use grasslands directly. No one has yet come up with a breakfast cereal based on grass flakes. We need to have a converter, one that can make use of things that we cannot. This is especially important because so much of the western prairies is not suitable for cereal production because of light soils and hills. Even regions with high quality soils, contain valley slopes and rocky areas that are best left under natural cover. And, the extensive grasslands in the southwest are too fragile for tillage. In all these areas, grazing is the best possible use of the land.

Farmers must grow different crops in rotation in order to preserve the health of the soil. Many of these crops such as oats, barley and rye have limited use for direct human consumption. Rye especially is an important crop because it is planted in the fall. It holds the soil over the winter and is in place and growing in the spring. It provides valuable winter food for deer and is a safe nesting place for waterfowl, since springtime farm operations do not disturb the nest. Unfortunately, rye prices are so low that many farmers cannot afford to grow it. We need a greater demand for feed rye, to allow farms to seed as much of this important crop as possible.

As well, even the best run farming operation will suffer quality loss of cereal crops from rain during harvest. Such

crops are not fit for human use and are graded for feed. We produce thousands of tons of these crops every year. Feed grade cereals would be of no use to us unless we can convert them through animals such as chickens and pigs into usable products. And the cow is the champion converter.

Cattle gain most of their weight on pasture. The rest comes from grain and more importantly hay. Alfalfa is a legume that is perennial. It grows every year. It holds the soil, and actually helps create new soil. It is the best crop that can be planted in terms of soil health and every farmer should include it in their crop rotations. However, it is of use only to animals such as cows and to a lesser extent hogs and chickens in prepared feeds. There must be a strong market for hay in order for the farmer to plant it, and this market must come from the cattle industry. We need more cows to consume more hay and create more soil.

Cattle are raised on hay and pasture, crops that create soil and do not require fertilizer and herbicides. They make use of feed grains and weather damaged grains that otherwise would be a direct loss to the farmer. Pasture and native grasslands constitute the best wildlife habitat that we have in our agricultural sector. The conversion of such areas to cropland would result in the loss of wildlife and a huge increase in soil erosion. The best action for an urban resident concerned about soil loss and chemicals in food is taken at the meat counter. Buying a steak supports the most sustainable agricultural practice that we have.