The importance of forages in livestock production in the United States

Sales of livestock and livestock products in the United States were valued at almost $22 billion in 1965 (13). This represents about 56% of total sales of agricultural commodities. Sales of products produced by cattle and sheep were valued at $14.5 billion, about two-thirds of all livestock products.

Cattle and sheep are capable of converting, to forms utilizable by and highly palatable to man, plant materials not utilizable to any considerable degree by most non-ruminant animals including man. Historically the ruminant, although entirely capable of utilizing large amounts of concentrates, has depended upon forages and roughages as the principal source of feed. In the past quarter century, cereal grains have become important sources of feed for ruminants in the United States. During this period the application of highly sophisticated production technology to genetically superior cereal crop varieties brought about production in quantities greatly in excess of the needs of humans and non-ruminant animals. Mounting surplus production resulted in depressed relative prices for cereal crops and they became increasingly attractive and valuable as sources of feed for ruminants in the production of meat and dairy products. Feed grains are rich energy sources and by their physical nature are well suited to mechanized and automated feeding.

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