

## **Feeding Cull Onions to Livestock**

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Cull onions are those that are not useable for human consumption or are generally considered waste and shall include the residue left in the field from the production of onion seed as well as commercial onions. Some states have set some rigid guidelines as in some cases animals die from eating cull onions.

The Idaho State Department of Agriculture has specific rules concerning the disposal of cull onions. Sheep or goats shall be fed no more than 53 lbs. of cull onions per individual animal per day. Cattle shall be fed a ration containing no more than twenty-five percent (25%) cull onions on a dry matter basis. Cull onions are 80-90% moisture.

Prior research has shown some evidence of onion poisoning when fed to young cattle. Eighty-five yearlings and calves were allowed 1000 Kg of onions per day. Signs of poisoning were observed after 5 days; twenty-two animals were affected with one fatality. New illnesses continued to occur for 5 days after the withdrawal of onions from the diet.

In another onion study lasting for 119 days, 36 cattle, allotted to 6 treatment groups, were fed a balanced growth diet containing 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, or 25% cull onions on a dry-matter basis. Cattle performance was comparable to that associated with barley-base non-onion diet; statistical differences were not observed among treatments. Addictive onion consumption was prevented by mixing chopped or crushed onions in a total balanced ration. Onions can be a safe economic feed if fed at the right level.

### *References:*

*Hematologic effects and feeding performance in cattle fed cull domestic onions (Allium cepa).  
Lincoln SD, Howell ME, Combs JJ, Hinman DD.*

*Onion poisoning of young cattle.  
Verhoeff J, Hajer R, van den Ingh TS.*