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Feeding Pumpkins to Livestock

As it nears the end of October you may be starting to think of what you can do with pumpkins that have been used for decorations once you are done with them or what to do with the pumpkins that were left sitting in the garden because they did not quite make the cut to be used as decorations or made into pie.

If you own livestock or poultry, you may be wondering if you can feed them the pumpkins you are no longer using for decorations or are left over from your garden. The answer to your question is, yes, pumpkins can be fed to livestock and chickens. However, if the pumpkins were turned into jack-o-lanterns and soaked in bleach, have candle wax on them, or have been painted, they cannot be fed to livestock or poultry due to the substances that are on them being toxic for livestock and poultry to consume. Pumpkin seeds are also safe for livestock to eat, but the seeds can have a bitter taste that is caused by a compound known as cucurbitacin. While the seeds are not poisonous, the bitter taste they have is meant to discourage herbivores from eating them and livestock may choose not eat the seeds because of the bitter taste. There have been discussions about pumpkins being used as dewormer for livestock. However, it has yet to be confirmed by research if pumpkins and/or pumpkin seeds are an effective dewormer. Livestock that are not used to eating pumpkins may be skeptical of eating them at first and if given a whole pumpkin, may ignore it or play with the pumpkin at first before deciding to eat the pumpkin once it is broken open.

For larger livestock that have the ability to break open the pumpkin themselves, the pumpkins can be given to them whole or the pumpkin can be cut into smaller pieces before feeding it to them. If you have livestock that are not able to break open the pumpkin or have trouble eating the pumpkin because it is too hard, you can soften the pumpkin by baking it before giving it to them. To bake the pumpkin, preheat the oven to 400 degrees F° and bake it for 30 minutes to an hour, or until the pumpkin becomes soft. Exact baking times will depend on the size of the pumpkin. Baking the pumpkin to soften it will also make it easier for you to cut up. For small livestock, such as sheep and goats, the pumpkin can be cut into pieces before feeding it to them to make it easier for them to eat. The pumpkin will need to be broken open or cut into pieces before feeding it to chickens. If livestock have not eaten pumpkin before, cutting up the pumpkin into small pieces may encourage them to at least try tasting the pumpkin.

Feeding left over pumpkins is not just a tasty treat for livestock and chickens, and a good way to recycle pumpkins that were used as decorations; pumpkins are also a source of nutrients. Pumpkins are a good source of vitamins A and E as well as folate and fiber. They can also be a supplemental source of protein for livestock. However, when pumpkins are not a regular part of an animal's diet, they should be fed in small amounts at a time to prevent them from upsetting the digestive system of livestock.

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