

New Cattle Microbe

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The rumen, the first of four chambers in the stomach of ruminants, is home to legions of microbes. According to a Michigan State University web site, there are more microbes in one cow's rumen than there are people on Earth.

These microbes break down cellulose, the chief part of plant tissue, making it digestible to their host. This lets herbivores live on forage grasses, hay and so on. And it benefits people that like to eat meat. The microbes indirectly turn hay into hamburger.

"A lot of people don't realize that in reality, meat is a product of food energy that otherwise wouldn't be usable by people," Dehority said — humans can't digest cellulose. "One of the reasons we study rumen microbes is to improve the utilization of feed by meat-producing animals."

A project he is starting soon, for example, will see if microbes from wild herbivores, such as wildebeest, impalas, zebras and giraffes, can be introduced into African goats and sheep. Reason: Wild species thrive on low-quality forage. Maybe livestock can, too, if they have the same microbes.

Driving Dehority's work is curiosity. He loves basic research — science that seeks simply to learn more about something, not necessarily find an immediate application. It has led him to non-cows like zebras and

quokkas, plus elk, moose, llamas, pronghorns, musk oxen, reindeer, and red, mule, axis, sika and white-tailed deer.

Why is basic research — on rumen microbes or anything else — important? Dehority likes to tell this story: "In 1957, the Russians shot up Sputnik. The United States immediately went to the scientific literature in the library, built a satellite, and shot it up about a year and a half later. Little if any new research was needed. All the information was in the library in journals, on the shelf.

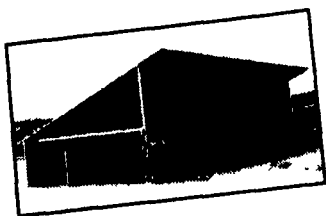
"I put information on the library shelf," he said. "That's how I explain what I do. Sometimes it has direct application, and sometimes it doesn't, and no one knows when it will be useful."

This is Dehority's second such honor. The first was last year, when Australian scientists found a new protozoa species in eastern grey kangaroos. Citing the Ohioan's "considerable contributions" to their field, they named it *Dasytricha dehorityi*.

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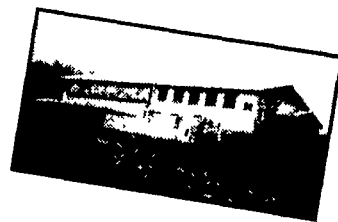
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