

Grazing Bites

August 2018

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August often seems to arrive too early and speeds by way too fast. Mentally to me, August 1st starts the countdown to the first frosty morning. That time frame, depending on where you are in Indiana, is generally 60-75 days. There is a lot to do in that time frame.

My first consideration is staging forages. I hope that you are constantly thinking ahead, planning the next move and knowing where, what, and how much forage is available. It's time to also start thinking about stockpiling forages for fall and winter use.

What fields are going to be stockpiled this year? They probably need to change from year to year, just like the first field grazed in the spring. Are they in the appropriate stage of growth? To have a quality stockpile, it needs to be pretty vegetative right now. Fields that have not been grazed much or at all this year could be stockpiled, but quality, production and efficiency take a hit. I overlook those factors to a degree if I'm wanting to build and/or improve soil organic matter or soil health, but there is some cost to this procrastination. I say that somewhat tongue in cheek because it is still probably better to graze it if you have it. It certainly is better than baling it at that point because it won't make quality hay. If the cows are going to pick through it, let them eat the best and trample the rest. There is no reason in moving those nutrients around.

Back to stockpiling. If you are lucky enough to catch some of these spotty rains, your forage is growing well and you have good nutrient presence through application, nutrient cycling and legumes, then you probably don't have to do too much to prepare for stockpile besides keeping the gate shut. Occasionally a cleanup, even-out type clipping is in order after the last grazing. Like I mentioned last month, that should require a good reason to justify. Occasionally a small application of nitrogen is in order as long as moisture is present. I prefer to maintain adequate amounts of legumes for nitrogen. This generally means at least 30% legumes by dry weight. Where lacking legumes, the addition of 30-60 pounds of nitrogen can certainly boost yield and quality of the stockpile, but it also creates some more competition for existing legumes.

My next thought is the addition of any annuals for this fall. Annuals planted after corn or soybeans can help improve the soil for the next crop and provide numerous other benefits, but they can also provide some quality forage for grazing. Every day that you are grazing annuals or crop residue or combination of the two in late summer or early fall, the more rest that is being provided to pastures, allowing more potential growth and grazing days and less hay days. Moisture is a factor in getting a good forage yield in September. Minimizing soil disturbance to plant these annuals will help reduce additional moisture loss. Plant as early as possible to maximize growing days. This often means planning ahead and possibly going with shorter season varieties.

My favorite mix is spring oats, turnips or radish and cereal rye. The oats and brassica come on early and with sufficient moisture can produce a lot of quality forage. The cereal rye remains fairly quiet in the background until spring and then it kicks in providing the opportunity for some spring grazing or just prime cover to no-till into.

I'll try and remember to discuss it more in September, but it's never too early to start figuring out how many potential grazing days might be left and also the amount of stored feed. I'd rather know now that I'm low on forage for the livestock I have, than to find out in the middle of the winter!



Should I hay it, or graze it?

Hay is somewhat limited this year. This makes some people think that they need to bale everything possible. We should think twice about this. First ask yourself if it can be grazed. Quite a bit of forage is rolled up and fed when it could have been grazed instead. There are a lot of wheels turning out there. Next ask yourself if it is practical to bale hay if you have to feed hay at the same time. It happens. If a wheel is turning, we are spending money. Like I've said before, cows (sheep, goats, horses, etc.) have four feet, are 4-wheel drive and harvest forage and spread manure at the same time. We need to let them do as much work as we can for us. They should be working for us, not us working for them.

There is also a lot of hay produced from very limited volumes. In other words, there isn't much out there to cut, but we cut it anyway. Put a pencil to those bales. I know hay may be scarce in some areas, but there is a somewhat fixed cost for mowing, raking, and to a degree, baling. The lower the yield, the higher the cost per bale. Those low yielding, last minute cuttings would probably be best grazed instead. Look at it as an opportunity to graze it or stockpile it. It is, for the most part, just standing "hay." It is a lot more efficient to harvest it by grazing, than by baling.

The dairy industry is certainly on my mind. I'm seeing several herds being sold and multi-generational dairies not knowing what the future holds. Dairy producers dedicate 365 days a year to their passion, their lifestyle, and put in grueling hours to accomplish what most people take for granted. The dairy producers I know are some of the most dedicated, hardworking individuals that you would ever meet. Take some time today to support the ones that are left, and give them a pat on the back.

I'll end today on a solemn note. The cattle and grazing world lost a good conrade on July 25th. Gearld Fry, a good friend of mine, passed away after a long battle with cancer. Gearld was a leader in selecting cattle for management in a natural, totally grass-based environment. He had a lifetime of experience that not only was very practical, but also seasoned by a ton of observation. Gearld often referred to an old French book written by M. Francis Guenon in the mid 1800's. Guenon spent years figuring out dairy cow indicators of production, especially butter fat, and important fertility traits. Gearld keyed in on these and brought them to light in our present time frame. Gearld also advocated linear measurement and other tools for cattle improvement. He not only touched thousands of people internationally, but he left a special legacy everywhere he stepped. I appreciate knowing him and spending time with him. Rest in peace Gearld, in greener pastures.

Keep on grazing!

Reminders & Opportunities

Purdue Forage Management Day – August 9, 2019 - Feldun – Purdue Ag Center in Bedford. Flyer for all the Purdue DTC trainings can be found at: https://ag.purdue.edu/agry/Documents/2018_DTC_BROCHURE.pdf

Preliminary topics for the training are going to be:

- Stand Establishment of Coated and Uncoated Red Clover and Alfalfa
- Sensory and Laboratory Analysis of Hay and Silage
- Replacement Beef Heifers Preference for BMR or Normal Sorghum-Sudangrass, Pearl Millet and Sudangrass
- Recommendations Regarding Fertilization of Forages with Sulfur
- Fence and Water Options for Livestock
- Value of a Heavy Use Area Pad

7th National Grazing Lands Conference – December 2-5, 2018, Reno, Nevada.
"Take the Gamble Out of Grazing."

More pasture information and past issues of Grazing Bites are available at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/technical/landuse/pasture/>

