

Grazing Bites



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Victor Shelton, NRCS State Agronomist/Grazing Specialist

Fall is here and it means that our perennial forages are starting to think about taking a siesta. You will want to do three things this time of year: grow as much forage as you can prior to plants going dormant, be as efficient as you can with what you have to graze, and take inventory on how much winter feed you have on hand.

There are still plenty of good growing days left this fall and they need to be taken advantage of. One of the first things to do to make sure you obtain as much growth as possible, especially with perennial forages, is to stop grazing forages that can and will continue to grow for a while, especially forages that will stockpile like tall fescue.

Tall fescue stockpiles better than almost any other forage in the midwest. I would rather that not be old Kentucky 31 endophyte-infected fescue, but even KY 31 makes some really good feed in the winter time, especially after going through a few hard freezes. Freezing and time help to improve it. Forages that will not stockpile well or ones that lose quality and nutritional value fast once they go dormant or freeze should be utilized first. But, before you open the gate to that pasture field with forages that won't stockpile for later, please consider first what other options you have right now. Remember what was mentioned last month; the more you can grow now, the more you will have to graze and the less feed will be needed.



Allocating out forages and strip grazing them can greatly improve the efficiency of the forage.

So, what do we have to graze? Hopefully you did better than me and got some annuals planted early enough and have a lot of good growth on them. Oats especially, if planted back in early August, will make some excellent forage now. These oats are probably best utilized by strip grazing them. We'll talk about that a bit more in a while.

If you planted a warm-season forage mix after wheat harvest, these forages can still be grazed now but with some caution as we approach colder weather. Once frosted, summer annual warm-season grasses such as sudangrass or sorghum-sudangrass hybrids quickly start shutting down and can produce a cyanide-containing compound commonly called prussic acid. This acid is the same compound that is produced by these plants under stressed conditions. Livestock should be removed from these forages for ten to fourteen days to allow the forages to "dry down" and the prussic acid to dissipate before grazing again. Frosted areas could be only "pockets" in a field to start with. Any regrowth from the base of the plant after a frost can also be very high in prussic acid. If in doubt about nitrates or prussic acid – test before feeding or grazing!

Corn stalks, like discussed last month, can help provide some good quality feed and will be even better if annuals were planted into them. Dry soil conditions are ideal and again, strip grazing across the field is better than just turning them into the whole. We want those stalks to last as long as they can and we also don't want to cause any compaction for the next crop. Grazing it under dry conditions, using a cover crop such as cereal rye, and not feeding on the crop field can help prevent and/or relieve compaction issues associated with grazing it.

Hay field aftermath may also be used as potential grazing. We are certainly at a point in time when it is not practical to really think about any more hay, especially where little forage regrowth is present and never mind how hard it can be to get it dry at this point. It's also hard to justify the costs of the necessary operations for what little forage is normally still remaining this time of year.

Another option that most people don't think about or even consider as an option this time of year is hay or other stored feeds. If you do not have anything else to graze other than pasture AND there is sufficient moisture, nutrients and time for more growth, then feeding some hay for a little while can allow for some growth that can be utilized later. I've actually done this in August before because of droughty conditions.

You want to be as efficient as possible with whatever you are grazing this time of year. You want the stalks or forage to last as long as possible and you don't want to waste too much either. Even if you don't strip graze any other time of the year, once forage growth slows down and especially after it stops, it really increases harvest efficiency. It's probably best to think of any remaining forage or stockpile as "standing" forage or "standing hay." You allocate out hay by the bale as needed, so why wouldn't you allocate out stockpiled forage the same way? You wouldn't turn the cows into the hay barn and say just eat what you need and don't waste any!

You can very easily strip graze across hay aftermath, stockpiled fields and corn residue with the use of some temporary fence. All you need is some step-in posts, some poly-wire on a reel and a way to make it electrified and you're in business. Use a simple plastic step-in post every 25 to 30 feet or as needed depending on the terrain and allocate out one to three days worth at a time. You will quickly recognize if you provided enough and adjust the next allocation. The cows will let you know if you shorted them. It's best to start at the watering facility end of the field and work away from it unless you have multiple watering sites.

Lastly, it is important to know how much forage, stockpiled forage, stalks, hay aftermath, annuals, hay, and other feed stuff is available for this winter. Weigh this against what is going to be needed for all the ruminant livestock on the farm. Do you have enough feed items until spring? Remember, on average, most ruminant livestock will utilize at least 3% of their body weight in dry matter per day (1,000 pound cow = 30 pounds of dry hay, not adjusted for moisture). Feeding efficiency of fed feeds is just as important as the allocation efficiency of standing forages. If poorly stored hay is also poorly fed, then up to fifty percent of a bale can be wasted. We'll try and talk about this subject more next month.

If you are short on forages and stored feed for this winter then now is the time to think about animal numbers. Do you have some that could or need to be culled? The quicker those animals leave the farm the better. Sharpen your pencil and do some math.

Plan ahead for the coming winter and keep on grazing!

Reminders & Opportunities

- **7th National Grazing Lands Conference** – December 2-5, 2018, Reno, Nevada. "Take the Gamble Out of Grazing"
- **2019 American Forage and Grazing Council Annual Conference and 75th Anniversary** — January 6-9, 2019, St. Louis, MO, Hyatt Regency at the Arch. Conference theme is "Forages Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow."
- **2019 Heart of America Grazing Conference** — January 22-23, 2019, Ferdinand Community Center, Ferdinand, Indiana
- **Northern Indiana Grazing Conference (NIGC)** – February 1-2, 2019, Michiana Event Center (new location) 4405 E Farver St., Shipshewana, IN. For more information about the NIGC or to get a registration form, please call the LaGrange County Soil & Water Conservation District office at 260-463-3471 extension 3.
- **Southern Indiana Grazing Conference (SIGC)** – March 6, 2019, Crane, IN – Speakers include Greg Judy, Darby Simpson, and Peter Allen. For more information contact the Daviess County Soil and Water Conservation office at 812-254-4780, Ext 3, email Toni Allison dc.swcd@daviess.org, or visit <http://www.daviesscoswcd.org/index.php/sigc> or <https://www.facebook.com/SouthernIndianaGrazingConference>
- 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/>

