POLK COUNTY GRAZIER

AUGUST 23, 2021

An eNewsletter brought to you by the Rich Mountain Conservation District

RMCD

EXTENDING THE GRAZING SEASON

Article adapted from the 2008 Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Publication, **Extending Grazing and Reducing Stored Feed Needs**, by: Ball, Ballard, Kennedy, Lacefield, and Undersander.

- A copy of this publication is attached and more provides detailed information.

Why Extend the grazing Season?

For most livestock producers, extending the grazing season for their animals, or otherwise filling gaps in pasture forage availability to reduce stored feed needs, should be a high priority objective. There are several reasons why this is beneficial:

⇒ **Better for the environment**—Feeding hay or other stored materials in a barn or other enclosed area concentrates animals, and the manure that accumulates requires expense to remove. Feeding livestock in pastures often results in hoof damage to the land.

⇒ **Weather is less of a concern**—Weather is a major concern with hay production, but animals can graze almost without regard to the weather.

⇒ **Higher-quality forage leads to better animal performance**—The forage quality of young, vegetative pasture growth and even leafy autumn residue is usually considerably higher than that of hay, which is produced by cutting older, more fibrous forage. Consequently, performance is typically better when animals graze properly managed pasture.

⇒ **Requires less labor**—Less labor is required to have animals graze rather than to provide them with stored feed. In particular, in contrast to feeding stored feed in an enclosed facility, the labor associated with manure removal is avoided.

⇒ **Lowers expenses**—Stored feed is almost always two to three times more expensive per animal or per day than pasture. In livestock budgets, stored feed typically accounts for 25% or more of the cost of production, and producer records often reveal it to be higher. The quantity of stored feed required is one of the best indicators of profitability for a livestock operation. In general, the less hay needed, the more cost-efficient the operation.

Clearly, extending the grazing season and reducing the need for stored feed is highly desirable. Though the best techniques to accomplish this vary with geographic region, type of farming operation, and other factors, this publication outlines strategies that can be used in some or many areas to extend grazing and reduce stored feed needs, thus increasing profit.

Proven Strategies for Extending the Grazing Season

1) Exploit forage growth distribution differences

⇒ Grow warm-season and cool-season perennial grasses—in this part of the US, both warm-season grasses (such as bermudagrass and bahiagrass) can be grown with cool-season grasses (such as fescue).

⇒ Use legume companion species—overseed legumes (such as white clover) into existing forages and avoid spraying with herbicides that can kill legumes. Frost seeding of white clover works well here (broadcast seed in late February or early march and then drag the field).

⇒ Plant annuals to complement perennials—overseed warm-season annuals (such as crabgrass, sudangrass, and millet) and cool-season annuals (such as cereal rye, ryegrass, legumes, and brassicas). Cool-season annuals should normally be planted using a no-till pasture drill in September or early October for fall grazing. More on cool-season annuals in a future newsletter.

⇒ Plant early—plant forages as early as safely possible but avoid grazing too early. Cool-season annuals planted in late October or November will not provide much fall grazing. Defer grazing winter annual grasses until they are at least 8 inches tall.

2) Stockpile Forage

⇒ Stockpile Tall Fescue—clip the fescue in August and immediately apply Nitrogen fertilizer, defer grazing until late fall or winter then start strip grazing. Stockpiled fescue can provide grazing through much of the winter.

⇒ Stockpile other forage crops—bermudagrass and other warm-season grasses can also be stockpiled but need to be harvested by the end of December.

⇒ Use stockpiled forage efficiently—strip grazing is the most economical way to utilize stockpiled forages. Only provide 1-3 days of stockpiled forage to the livestock at a time. Strip grazing using an electric fence charger, polywire on a reel, and step-in post work very effectively and can be moved very easy.

3) Take advantage of unique grazing opportunities

⇒ Graze hayfields—instead of baling a hay crop in October and then turning around and start feeding it to the livestock in November, consider strip grazing the hayfield and letting them do the work. The labor, fuel, and equipment cost can be considerable and not needed.

⇒ Use other plant growth—consider grazing woodlots or other non-pasture areas that may provide some additional forages.

4) Forage or livestock management approaches

⇒ Improve your grazing management—rotational grazing systems reduce overgrazing and allow graziers to reduce forage losses. Maximizing the rest periods between grazing fields reduces the impacts of drought and allows for forages to be grazed earlier in the growing season.

⇒ Improve soil fertility—Well-fertilized, vigorous plants begin growth earlier and resist stresses such as drought better than weaker, nutrient deficient plants. Apply fertilizer and lime according to soil test recommendations. Rotational grazing allows for more even distribution of recycled nutrients (in the form of manure).

5) Other useful concepts

⇒ Match forage quality and nutrient intake to animal needs—calves have higher needs for energy and protein so provide them good quality pasture. Dry, pregnant cows can be lower quality pasture or hay.

⇒ Change the stocking rate—reduce the number of livestock on the farm by moving them to another farm, culling some open mature cows, or selling some calves early.

⇒ Provide supplemental feed during warm weather—drought or armyworms can cause pastures to be short and continued grazing can cause long term harm to the forages. Consider moving the animals to a sacrifice field and feeding hay to reduce further damage to the forages.

⇒ Minimize hay losses—hay storage and feeding losses can account for 10% of the cost of livestock production. The more hay that is wasted the more that must be purchased to feed animals. Consider unrolling the hay when feeding to reduce the amount that is wasted.

Upcoming Grazing Meetings and Seminars:

⇒ **August 24, 2021— Bermudagrass Demonstration—Establish or Manage? (1PM—online seminar)** you are invited to attend the weekly grazing training sessions by Jeremy Huff, the USDA/NRCS state grazing specialist. He offers these training sessions as a Zoom meeting and the instructions for logging in are included in attached flyer. If you have the Zoom app on your phone you can just scan the QR code on the flyer. If you want to see it on your computer there is a link included in the attachment. There are sessions normally every Tuesday at 1pm so see the attached flyer.

⇒ **August 24, 2021— Demystifying Regenerative Grazing and Soil Health (10AM-3PM—online seminar)** The National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) will host a two-part workshop in August for ag professionals, educators and mentor farmers to provide information and hands-on training on regenerative grazing, soil health, and monitoring. NCAT soil and livestock specialists will be joined by Dr. Allen Williams of Understanding Ag, LLC. to lead these workshops. Click here for more information and to register.

⇒ **August 31, 2021— Spring Development for Livestock Watering Systems (1PM—online seminar)** next week's online training by Jeremy Huff. see the attached flyer.

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Take a picture with your cell phone to visit the RMCD website —>

SCAN ME

Did you Know?

⇒ Stockpile fescue at 1 acre per cow. Under normal conditions this will provide a 75-90 day feed supply if strip grazed properly. An acre of fescue stockpiled for 90 days typically produces 3,000 pounds of forage.