

Grazing Bites

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I have a chest cold, faulty furnace, and over a foot of snow to deal with, what a way to start out the New Year. I probably have said it before, but I think it was Robert Frost that said, "You can't get too much winter in the winter"...I disagree! I already miss not seeing grass on the landscape and I know that there is a lot of livestock that feel the same way.

Stockpiled forages become more challenging to manage and consume the deeper the snow gets. Sometimes it is just easier and better to put out hay and wait until the forages are more accessible again. Livestock that are used to grazing stockpiled forages surprisingly are not as concerned about snow being on top and just continue to graze. Forages usually maintain good condition and quality even covered long periods with snow. It always surprises me how green and crisp especially turnips and other brassicas are under these conditions. Livestock readily consume these turnips a la mode.



It really is not that difficult to continue to allocate out the forages utilizing the normal step-in poly posts, poly-wire and reels. I will say though, that a post and wire color other than white might not be a bad idea in snow conditions, but I've had more issue with it than the livestock. The more stockpiled "mass" you had present prior to going dormant and then the snow, the easier it is for the livestock to continue harvesting it, even in deeper snow. I've actually had animals turn down hay before and continue to graze the stockpiled forages...and it was good hay. That is just a friendly reminder that the quality of good stockpile is often just that, good.

If you are feeding hay, you ideally don't want to put out too much at a time to create some competition, reducing waste and improving efficiency, additional hay could be set out for the next feeding or two and fenced off with some temporary electric fence in lots of cases. Hay is an input into the operation, so when utilized, it needs to be efficient as possible.

I've seen producers in late fall strategically place large round bales out in the field where they will be fed and then move electric fence (and ring feeders if used) allocating the hay as needed. You certainly are putting the nutrients back in the field when you do this, but will also have to overlook in some cases the increased amount of disturbed sod that will require a longer rest period to bounce back. This certainly lessens the impact of tractor tires mudding around in the winter or you racing the cows to the gate in some cases. I've recently seen two small horse farms that had preset out bales and had each individual bale covered with a tarp. For larger operations, capes made just for large rounds can be made or purchased and do help shed some rain until ready to be utilized.

The hay feeding location should be thought out. It should have proper drainage, fairly close to a water source if possible, and not located where it will cause problems such as along a stream or above or

adjacent to a water body. The ideal site should always be where water is available and nutrients are lacking...easier and cheaper to feed where you want the nutrients than to haul them there later.

It is also time to start thinking about frost-seeding additional or needed legumes into pastures and hayfields needing them. Frost seeding is certainly one of the least expensive ways to enhance the stand of legumes in your pastures. It is basically the process of broadcasting the legume seed onto the soil surface during the winter dormant months. I usually say the ideal time period is somewhere between Christmas and Valentine's Day. If I really had my choosing, I'd wait until there is a "light" snow on the ground and then do the sowing...it is a bit thick at the moment. The snow serves two good purposes. One, it helps "catch" the seed and transport it to the ground and two, it serves as a great marker for the tractor or ATV.

I usually recommend slightly higher seeding rates for frost seeding than for conventional seeding. White clovers can be seeded at 1-1.5 lb per acre, remembering that it is a lot smaller seed than red clover and will be around longer. You can get it on too thick and yes, I know, it's hard to seed that small amount! Red clover should be seeded at 6-8 lbs per acre; birdsfoot trefoil at 5 lbs per acre and common lespedeza with hulled seed at 10 lbs. All legumes should be inoculated with the appropriate inoculants for that species to insure proper bacteria, good germination, and growth.

Keep on grazing!

Mark your Calendar!

Indiana Grazing Conferences –

Northern Indiana Grazing Conference – February 1-2, 2013; Michiana Event Center in Howe, Indiana. Speakers include Scott Stoller from Sterling, Ohio, Reuben Stoltzfus from Pennsylvania, Will Winter from Wisconsin (this is really a brain you want to pick), Howard Person, Jerry Perkins, Jim Courtright, and yours truly all from here in Indiana. For more information contact the LaGrange County Soil and Water Conservation office at 260-463-3471, Extension 3, email Marsha Bogado at marsha.bogado@in.nacdnet.net or visit their website at <http://www.lagradeswcd.org>.

Southern Indiana Grazing Conference – February 6th, 2013; Simon Graber Community Center near Odon, Indiana. Speakers will include Walt Davis who raises cattle, sheep and goats and author of the book, "How to Not go Broke Ranching", knows the tricks of the trade; David Hall from Missouri, selecting cattle for fescue; Gabe Brown from North Dakota, Gabe is adamant that a successful farm starts with a healthy soil, Gabe is backed by Jay Fuhrer from NRCS tying livestock into a healthy cropping system; Ed Ballard from Illinois, specializing in extending the grazing season, and Wally Olson from Oklahoma with years of experience in marketing strategies. For more information contact the Daviess County Soil and Water Conservation office at 812-254-4780 Extension 3, email Toni Allison at dcswcd@rtccom.net, or visit their website at http://daviesscoswcd.org/main/page_sigc.html.

Livestock, Forage & Grain Forum - February 11, 2013, JW Marriott, Indianapolis - Registration opens December 1st – more information is available at http://www.indianasoybean.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=386