

Grazing Bites

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This spring is certainly quite a bit different than last year. I remember quite well days in the 80's about this time last year. I would be reasonably happy with even upper 60's and slightly warmer nights and I know the forages and livestock would also. Spring forage has not "jumped" quite like normal, but it has been put through the wringer the past year, so a slower start should be somewhat expected.

Whether we like it or not, numerous pastures were overgrazed last season. This was done for three main purposes; an attempt to maintain an unsustainable number of livestock under the conditions that were present; a relentless grazing to obtain the absolute last morsal available instead of feeding precious hay or reducing numbers; or the lack of any management. I'm sorry if that seems a bit harse; but unfortunately it is true.

I figure you know the direction I am heading...but like I've told my farm hand, "I would not have to repeat it if it had been remembered the first time." He will roll his eyes and probably say, "I didn't forget, I just did not remember it in time". Short forage makes for short roots, short roots make for more short forage. Can we reverse this? Absolutely. The primary key to maintaining forage yield always starts with adequate soil fertility but must be accompanied with good grazing and forage management.

It is always advisable to not graze forages too short...unless you want to intentionally set the forage back. Grazing the forages hard, prior to the forages going dormant in the winter, will delay growth in the spring giving newly seeded legumes a better chance to establish (less competition) but should not be done every year. On that same subject line, if you frost seeded legumes during the winter, you will need to be diligent in managing the existing forage and not letting it get so much growth on it that it chokes out new seedlings. Grazing started at about 6 to 8 inches and removing about half the growth will keep excess growth in check and really help the legumes seedlings get a foot hold.

The hot dry weather last year was very hard on forages and especially if they were grazed shorter than they should have been. Pastures that were grazed appropriately last summer and fall (cover maintained, not grazed too short), rebounded quite well with late fall rains and will/are rebounding quite well this spring. Pastures that were grazed to the quick will need more time to recover this spring. Growing or regrowth of new roots will be the primary plant concern, then green top for solar collection. The best thing you can do for some of these stress stands is allow them a lot more rest. That does not mean not graze them...it means be very diligent in making sure that you don't overgraze any at all...starting right now...today. Maintain cover, maintain live plant material; make sure that the appropriate "stop grazing" heights are adhered to.

Most of our tall cool-season forages that we have here in Indiana should never be grazed below 3 inches, ideally 4 inches. That does not mean average height; it does not mean that that 4 inch plant is the tallest one left out there by the manure piles either... When the shortest plants in the paddock or pasture reach that height...then it is time to move.



Adequate rest should be, at a minimum, the time needed for the plants total above ground “removable” portion to at least double...more is better. Land is getting more scarce and increasing in value especially with high commodity prices right now. We need to make sure we are getting the most production out of what we have...increase the production of those pastures or better yet double the production of your pastures...about the same as getting an extra farm free...now there is some forage for thought.

Keep on grazing!

Mark your Calendar!

Grazing 102 – June 7th and 8th, 2013 at the Southern Indiana Purdue Ag Center, Dubois, Indiana. Contact Jason Tower at towerj@purdue.edu, 812-678-4427 for more information or questions and refer to the attached brochure.

Purdue Forage Day – June 21, 2013, Roann, Indiana. There will be more details coming.

Purdue Forage Management Day – September 5th, 2013, Purdue Agronomy Farm DTC.