

Grazing Bites

May 2013

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My Uncle used to talk about grass being in head by 5th of May...usually was right. It will be pushing it to get there this year. Grass tips have been nipped by cold weather again, but at least moisture is not lacking. Some areas last year certainly had some reduced yield because of freezing of new growth but I don't see that as much of an issue this time.

The northern part of the state appears to be still waiting for spring to appear. Wet and cold conditions have kept them from doing much if any grazing on new growth. Some in the very northern counties might reluctantly agree that they might be too close to the permafrost area. Lush green pastures will come in time.

A lot of pastures were grazed down pretty tight last fall because of the droughty conditions we had and therefore went into winter with less forage mass and live root mass than normal. Residual and good healthy roots can make a huge difference in how much traffic ground can withstand under extremely wet conditions. The more root mass, the more cover, and the more top, always better.

Hay supplies are either limited or gone by now and there is no more waiting...you just have to graze. So, rules of thumb for these conditions: First, start or continue grazing the fields or paddocks with the most growth present, ideally with a fair amount left over from last year if that is possible. The heavier amount of material will help to protect the soil and provide some "cushion" to slow down pugging. Keep the animals moving- if they are in any one area for any extended period under saturated conditions, they will do more damage. If paddocks are fairly good sized then leave them long enough to just top the growth and then move them to the next area. This actually will serve more than one purpose, the topping will hamper seed head development slightly right now (more deferment as the plant matures) and it is allowing the plant to maintain that solar panel and keep producing roots and leaf which will help give structure to the site and it will help maintain quality. It will also help stage the paddocks for future grazing. I don't see any hay making weather in the near future, but I would be hesitant to graze fields that will be cut for hay that are extremely wet until they dried up enough that they are less likely to pug.

Keep grazing new paddocks until the first paddocks grazed have re-grown back to a desirable height (for most cool-season tall grass combinations 8-10 inches) and then start back on them. Not applying too much fertilizer, especially nitrogen, in the early spring will help keep this furious growth under a little more control.

I would take the fields that are the hardest to hay/mow and graze them in the early rotated half and leave the better fields for haying/mowing if that was my plan. If I did not plan on doing any hay or clipping, then I would think more about what fields really need more rest this spring. Rest is good. Just remember – more green top, more solar panel, more roots, and more production...more grazing.

Areas where you fed hay this winter and early spring are probably by now a muddy mess. With discarded and uneaten hay, manure and just mud, these areas will take a while to dry out enough to do



anything with. Once they do, rotten hay and manure can be pushed up in piles to compost and later spread on fields for some added fertility and organic matter. The feeding area if left will turn into a “healthy” stand of weeds usually including some of our favorites such as prickly pig weed, lambs-quarter, crabgrass and an assortment of other opportunists that like high phosphorus and organic matter. These areas can often be worked slightly and sown to sorghum-sudangrass, sudangrass, or millets for summer grazing and for a little cover. I’ve also seen brassicas sown into these areas with success, but I’d still mix them with some annual grass such as one mentioned above.

We should always be looking for ways to keep grazing, no matter the conditions present, to keep from having to bring in outside, purchased, or labor intensive inputs which do nothing but draw from our bottom line. With a little thought and planning, grazing under almost any condition can be very environmentally and financially friendly.

Last thought today is to consider using a high magnesium mineral supplement. With some cooler than normal conditions, and lots of very green wet grass, grass tetany is a concern. Locations where more than adequate nitrogen and potassium have been added would be at higher risk. Consult your local veterinarian or extension agent for more information.

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.

GLCI Strategic Plan: http://www.glci.org/assets/GLCIstrategicPlan_Rev_2012_Web_Version.pdf