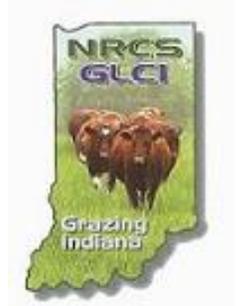


Grazing Bites

July 2013

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The majority of Indiana seems to remain blessed with rain. I think I can still say “blessed”, though few dry days for hay making, or the finishing of planting row crops, seems to be limited. It certainly is better than the droughty conditions we had last year which hopefully won’t return later in our near future; at least our ground reserves will be better. The rain certainly has gained us good moisture conditions for planting some summer annuals to be grazed later this year.



It is an ideal time to plant some brassicas for fall use. Forage type brassicas that are early summer seeded are highly productive and digestible and usually can be grazed 75 to 120 days after seeding. Summer seeded brassicas (seeded now to August) can help supplement fall forages and also help extend the grazing season. Kale tends to be best used for late summer seeding and normally overwinters fairly well. Turnips, will work either time period, and will also mix well with Italian ryegrass for fall/winter grazing or with sorghum-sudangrass or millets for summer grazing. Do not plant Italian ryegrass in crop fields; it can be harder to kill. Annual ryegrass would be better in that case.



Cows grazing sorghum-sudangrass

The common “no name” purple top turnip can yield over 10,000 pounds per acre of dry matter and provide an average 12-20% crude protein. Doesn’t that sound better than some normally dry looking cool-season grass that is trying to or going dormant in the increasing summer heat? That high moisture, high protein forage matches up well when fed with that drier grass though making it easier to balance that fiber nitrogen ratio in the rumen...meaning better gains. Brassicas alone can be a little rich.

Brassicas do best planted into a firm seedbed at a very shallow depth (1/4 inch or less), which means barely scratching the surface if no-till drilling them and good control of any growth is essential. Tilled ground should be culti-packed, broadcast seeded and then culti-packed again after seeding. Most brassicas are seeded at about 4 pounds per acre.

As mentioned above, the ability to graze some dry forage and some brassicas at the same time is optimal. Brassicas contain a lot of water and crude protein and lack much fiber, and gains will be best when grazed with some dry material available to help maintain that rumen mat.

Turnips will regrow if the growing point at the top of the bulb is **not** removed. Ideally, leave at least 4-6 inches of growth if you want to graze it again. If you only see “white”, you have probably grazed it too much!

Kale can be seeded for fall/winter use with a light seeded cereal rye, which can provide some good fall grazing, and then more grazing the following spring. Oats are another option for mixing with turnips for

spring or fall use. Another great combination for fall/winter use is turnips, cereal rye and oats; just love this combination.

We are just a few weeks away from the start of the fall seeding period for cool-season grasses. We have struggled the past couple years to have ideal planting conditions with lack of enough moisture in the fall and too much in the spring...at least at the moment with the calendar clicking away this season appears to have some potential good conditions. With this in mind, it would be good to start thinking ahead about seed, fertility, lime, and land preparation.

If it is presently pasture or hay ground, then taking a late cutting or grazing it shorter than normal (at least for some) is a good place to start. If you are going to be establishing new grass, then it is usually best to completely kill out the existing stand. Trying to inter-seed grass into grass is normally a waste of time, money and of course seed.

Shop and choose a high quality seed, named varieties and from reputable companies. Do the math and seed at pure live seed (PLS) rates. Take the amount of seed needed (4 lbs/Ac PLS) and divide it by (percent purity x percent germination). 4 lbs divided by (.95x.80) = 5.26 pounds of seed needed per acre. A bargain is not always a bargain. Do the math. Figure the real price on PLS rates.

If you are adding to an existing alfalfa field, a late maturing orchardgrass works quite well for this purpose and is best seeded at about 6-8 pounds per acre with a no-till drill. Inter-seeding alfalfa into alfalfa does not work because of auto-toxic compounds present in the older established plants.

A well established and managed forage crop should last for many years so take the time to do it right and it will pay you back in dividends for a long time.

If you are grazing any warm season grasses such as Switchgrass, Indiangrass, or Big Bluestem, make sure to not graze them any closer than 6-8 inches. The stand can be thinned quickly from over grazing. This is the start of prime time for grazing these warm-season grasses. Producers that had some of these warm season perennials last year were much better off than ones relying solely on cool season forages.

Remember, if I can double the amount of grass grown – I've gained another farm! As always, keep on grazing!

Reminders & Opportunities!

Field Day – Tall Grass Rotational Grazing for Dairy Cattle and Grass-fed Cattle Genetics featuring Gearld Fry – July 9th, 2013. For more information contact The Swiss Connection at swissconnectioncheese@gmail.com or call 812-939-2813.

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

Several Grazing Field Days, Workshops and Conferences coming up later this year and this coming winter; stay tuned.