

Grazing Bites

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I was glad for the rain I got this past Saturday; it was certainly needed. I would have really preferred it to come slightly slower than it did, but wouldn't have turned it down no matter how it came. I personally did not see any runoff and that is good, with adequate cover and actively growing forages, I think I captured most of it and replenished the ground reserves. When asked what is the number one management item with pasture, my answer is always "cover, maintain the cover". That is so true for many reasons, but for the moment, retarding and capturing runoff from a rain and increasing the ability of that water to infiltrate into the soil, store more of it for later, and protect it from evaporation can make all the difference some years.

Last fall, after weeks of severe drought and when the rains finally started to find us again, there was clearly positive and visual differences in pastures where cover and proper "stop grazing" heights were maintained compared to pastures that were allowed to be grazed shorter than...well...than it should be. An old acquaintance of mine would say, "It was grubbed down to the quick." It was obvious that the maintained cover and adequate reserve made a huge difference. I did some clippings on comparable sites, same soils, same forages looking at and measuring the new regrowth, first four weeks and then six weeks after the first good, regrowth-starting rain and was amazed with the difference in all cases. At six weeks, the pastures with good cover and maintained, adequate, what I like to call, "stop grazing heights" ranged from 2.2 to 3.1 times more yield than the unmaintained sites by dry weight. I found this very interesting, though somewhat anecdotal in nature it was data that I had not looked at before. It is certainly something to think about. Last year with the shortage of pasture and hay, any additional forage was a blessing. I think that there was some synergy going on too, but that was made possible because of that cover.

Now, the cool-season grasses should start their autumn rebound as moisture becomes replenished and hopefully continues, providing some potentially really good growth for fall or winter grazing. I have to say again, "grazing" not haying. Although we often have plenty of growth for a fall hay crop, drying conditions are more challenging and unless the field is not grazable for one reason or another, you would be much better off and money ahead to graze it or stockpile it for later in the winter if at all possible...it is not going anywhere! That forage can wait until you need it...in the field.

It is beneficial, for at least some of the fall growth, to wait until it is dormant (roughly 3 less than 26 degree nights) before grazing it. By waiting, energy reserves are not compromised for next spring's growth. This is an excellent practice for any fields that may have been grazed shorter than prescribed during the year and allow time for the forage plants to have a little R&R. Early harvested corn residue can be grazed if good conditions are present which will allow for more rested pasture. Any time off of a pasture is that much more time for regrowth and that many more days to keep on grazing. Anything that the animal can harvest itself instead of you carrying it to it is money in your pocket. With cattle prices up and with more potential for profit on gain, some supplementation might be warranted...with a sharp pencil and caution. Gains on high quality forages can be very good and compete quite well with most fed feeds and at a cheaper price. On lower quality forages, additional energy and sometimes protein is

advantageous and/or needed. Energy is more likely to be the limiting factor than protein in most cases. It is important that any fed items don't disrupt the sensitive flora of the rumen required to break down forages. Lowering the pH below 6.0 is extremely hard on fiber digesting bacteria, at 5.8 it is pretty much certain death of that flora. Fiber digesting bacteria prefer a pH of 6.0 to 6.8 and starch digesting bacteria 5.5 to 6.0...middle line for both, which is hard to maintain, is 6.0. Soybean hulls and corn gluten generally don't lower the pH of the rumen as much, corn and most whole grains can drop it rapidly and can even cause acidosis. Hay does not seem to be much of an issue this year; however quality hay could be. The early hay season was not a good one for dry hay. Also with all of the rain, energy may not be quite as high as normal; better to test and supplement as needed.

I hope you will seriously consider all of the potential grazing opportunities out there. Everyone should be asking themselves, "Where, should the livestock be grazing next?" "What should we be taking advantage of right now to obtain the best nutrition possible for the livestock?"

Especially in the areas that have received a little rain, and now have some improved soil moisture; we still have adequate time yet to get some annuals planted for some nice fall and possibly spring grazing. I really like the combination of cereal rye, oats and a forage type turnip. The oats and turnips usually do quite well in the fall and provide lots of good grazing opportunities while the rye will lay low and then take off strong next spring. With adequate moisture I have seen yields of 3 or more tons per acre produced in a very short period of time. Ideally, these stands should be strip-grazed with a back fence if you want to try and get multiple grazings...the weather does play a big part though. You need to have some moisture and ideally good growing conditions for several weeks with a late freeze. The turnips will tolerate colder conditions than the oats and quite often can be grazed even under snow. This appears to be the beginning of a really nice fall, hopefully it will be. Fall is quite often my favorite time of year and sometimes some of the



Fall planted winter peas and cereal rye ready to graze in the spring.

best weather, enjoy it.

As always, keep on grazing!

Reminders & Opportunities!

Heart of America Grazing Conference – January 20-21, 2014, Columbus, IN

Southern Indiana Grazing Conference – February 5th, 2014, Odon, IN – Jim Gerrish and Kathy Voth are main speakers.

Northern Indiana Grazing Conference – February 7-8, 2014 - Michiana Event Center, Howe, IN.

Stay tuned for more information along with other workshops and field days.