

Illinois Grazing Manual Fact Sheet SPECIES • ANNUAL AND ALTERNATIVE

Grazing Maize (Corn)



What

Grazing standing corn as a winter-feed source for cattle. Grazing standing corn is becoming a viable option where pasture acres are limited, and the cattle need a higher energy feed to carry them through the demanding winter months.

Maize can be grazed in the summer months as well as winter. Grazing may be used as needed during any time of the year; however, if the plant is grazed below the growing point it will not re-grow. If grazed above the growing point, the plant can re-grow but will not make grain, just foliage. Usually, grazing occurs during times of drought or when the cool season forages are in a growth slump. The management techniques for grazing are the same regardless of the season grazed. Start them slow and limit feed!

Why

Corn is a readily available food source for cattle on most Midwestern farms. The research and field trials are taking place in Ohio to Nebraska in the Corn Belt. If the producer watches the economics closely he can feed his cows from 50 cents to 60 cents per day. This is calculated from the estimated bushels of corn times the market value of the crop. This option also allows for a rest period for the grasses that can be stockpiled for winter grazing, such as tall fescue. It is easier for most cattlemen to reduce the costs than raise the production level.

How

First a producer must look at the best corn hybrids for grazing, if that is the goal. Most seed corn companies have specific hybrids that are recommended for silage. These hybrids tend to have a higher leaf to stalk ratio. Also, the plants will have smaller stalks, which are bred to be more digestible for silage and grazing.

There are different methods of managing your corn for grazing that can be used. One client mows a path through the field to put up the electric fence; this allows the farmer to build the fence easier. The cows will pike up the shredded stalks and corn from under the fence, so nothing is lost anyway. Another client shells his corn and leaves every other corn head pass standing, this allows for the fence to be built in the existing shelled rows. This also allows the cows to have a wider access to more stalks in the field than corn. Most all that graze standing corn will limit the area of access to about one tenth of an acre at a time. This is done even with 90 to 100 cows. Some clients have allowed a limited access to corn, at first, for only an hour or two at a time for the first day into each new section. This is done because the cows will usually go from ear to ear and feed first only on the grain.

Where

For more information about grazing maize, contact your local office of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, listed in the telephone book directory under U.S. Government, or the University of Illinois Extension.

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