



## Field Notes for The Week Of 4-17-2023

### Be Cautious on The First Round of Grazing

I believe mother nature is getting in a hurry and wants to start her summer vacation a little early! This past week was a beautiful week for the southern Ohio farmers with warm days and little precipitation to slow down fieldwork. The farm was busy indeed with fertilizer applications being made, seedbed preparation, and even some corn and soybeans being planted as well. Some days reached the upper 70s and even low eighties. These warm conditions paired with cool nights were a recipe for growth. The pastures and hay fields took quite the growth spirit this week as most of our cool season forages begin to bolt and will soon be rushing to make that first seed head of the season. Every spring is a little different, I try to keep good records on when I start and stop grazing my pastures, and I also try to note the health and regrowth of the pasture or hay after my first cutting or grazing. One thing that I have learned is patience is critical and rest is a necessity!

Too often farmers abuse or neglect pastures because the return in income is not seen as clear as selling a load of corn or soybeans. But as soon as the pastures become a barren desert, you will begin to hear the grumbling of feeding hay. The first grazing of a pasture is probably the most important practice a livestock farmer can either do right or completely mess up (I have done both). When the grass greens up and the livestock are breathing their heads through the fence to eat it, it is hard not to open up the gate and let them roll! But patience is key, allowing forages to reach 8-12 inches in height first is important. To measure forage, take a yardstick and place it in the forage straight up and down. The height is the last number that you can see on the stick on the top of a blade of grass. After you know your height then grazing can begin, Setting the stocking rate, a quick calculation to estimate stocking rate = total land / #of Animal Units (1000lbs) x grazing season example = 1 have 20 1300 lbs cows grazing for 8 months on 100 acres of pasture = (20 1300 lbs = 26 animal units ),  $100\text{ac} / 26 \times 8 \text{ months} = 2.06 \text{ animal units per acre}$ . Another critical step is to estimate animal needs and forage inventory to prevent overgrazing forages at their most vulnerable stage of growth. A 1300-pound brood cow will consume about 3% of her body weight a day,  $1300 \times 0.03 = 39\text{lbs}$  of dry matter forage. Next, let's say that my fescue-based pasture is 12 inches tall, the average dry matter yield for good quality fescue forage is 180-200 lbs of dry matter per inch of growth. Example=  $190\text{lbs} \times 12\text{-inch-tall fescue} = 2,280\text{lbs}$  of dry matter forage per acre. Now we know how many animal units we have per acre, how much forage is available, and how much the cows are going to consume each day. The last but most important factor I like to address is rest time. Taking the livestock off the pasture leaving 4 inches of residual growth is very important for a bounce back and plant longevity. Yes, you can even kill fescue with overgrazing, and then all you have is cocklebur! Rest periods should be scheduled for 28-30 day intervals for most grass-based pastures. But once again just like most things in agriculture, mother nature can throw a curve ball. Happy grazing!

