

April 16, 2019
 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Five Common Grazing Mistakes

As we have seen grass green up here in Southern Ohio over the past few weeks, livestock are nibbling on any fresh green grass they can. This is the time of the year that will test your fence, and show you the weak spots in that fence. With the hay supply nearly gone for many producers grazing has to come soon if not already. The following appeared in the Beef Blog recently and was in the Progressive Forage publication. I think this points out a few things that we all need to consider when it comes to grazing and how to best manage the forage in our pastures now and into the future.

Whether it's the use of unnecessary commas, neglecting to floss or making only the minimum payments on a credit card, people often make the same mistakes. Runners may forget their form; homebuyers sometimes skip the home inspection; and graziers – well, they're not exactly exempt from slipups either. According to Mary Drewnoski, a beef systems specialist with the University of Nebraska, there are five common grazing mistakes that stand out. She explained each and their role in the profitability of operations at the Driftless Beef Conference in Dubuque, Iowa, in January.

1. Not Understanding the Plant's Needs

Grazing heights and rest periods are frequently discussed and important when it comes to management, but why? Drewnoski explained that plants have to reserve some of their energy for regrowth. The challenge, however, is not all plants store their energy in the same place. For example, orchardgrass is one that puts its energy reserves in the stem base, while alfalfa and other legumes store energy in the taproots. She said that knowledge completely alters the begin-and-end grazing heights.

“We've got to think about what we do in the fall and how that sets us up for the spring growth,” Drewnoski said. “The same thing goes for the spring. We know we go into a bit of dormancy in the summer sometimes, so we need to think about how we are setting ourselves up toward the end of that vigorous growth to where we can take advantage of the conditions when they get good again.”

2. Not being flexible

Drewnoski cautioned producers about succumbing to “impatient cow syndrome,” or in other words, moving the cows to a new paddock too early.

“How many of you have kids or grandkids?” Drewnoski asked the audience. “Do you give them candy every time they want candy? No, they have to eat their vegetables, right? If you end up moving the cows when they want, they definitely won't eat what was left over when they return to that pasture because it will be too mature.”

The key is having small enough paddocks where you can force them to eat those so-called “vegetables,” she said.



3. Not investing in the pasture

According to Drewnoski, soil sampling is a practice that can't be overlooked. She explained that while cattle might not take nutrients off the pasture per se, they do spread them around, and it's not always in the most desirable places.

"How many of you have an alley in your rotational grazing system? How many of you have access to that alley all of the time because that's where the waterer is?" she asked the audience. "Your alley doesn't grow a whole lot of forage, but it does have a lot of nutrients because they go through and put it there. So they are taking the nutrients from the paddock and putting it in the alleyway. The same goes for around trees and other loafing areas, so we need to think about soil sampling."

She recommended producers sample their pasture every three years, or to make it a little more manageable, sample one-third of the pasture every year. Producers should pay close attention to the soil pH, because if the soil is acidic, the grass and especially the legumes won't yield nearly as well.

4. Not making use of technology

Similar to purchasing a bull, Drewnoski said seed selection is a long-term investment where only the best varieties should be used. "This is not the place to cheap out," she said. "In particular, make sure you have low-weed seed, high germination and improved variety. I really like certified seed because that means they are third-party verified. Unfortunately, a lot of companies have stopped doing that because it is an added cost, but you want to make sure you at least get those three things on that tag."

In addition, Drewnoski encouraged producers to continue to experiment and tweak the way they currently do things. Tools such as electric fencing, temporary pipe and tumbleweed wheels are all ways to test potential changes in pasture design and improve forage utilization.

5. Not taking advantage of opportunities

Wrapping up her presentation, Drewnoski encouraged attendees to take these concepts, as well as others learned at the conference, and put them into practice. "If you learn all of this but never apply it, it's not going to make a difference," she said. "So go home and put ideas you learned into action."

Dates to Remember

April 18 Seminar on Herbs – hosted by the OSUE Brown County Master Gardener Volunteers from 7:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. Room 208 at the Mt. Orab campus of Southern State Community College. Free and open to the public.