

Penn State researchers try year-round grazing

RECTOR, PA - Skilled use of portable electric fences and several species of forage crops has allowed The Pennsylvania State University's Southwestern Field Research Laboratory, near here, to keep a herd of 30 beef cows and their calves entirely on pasture for the last five years. The cattle are outdoors year round, and feed entirely on forage.

Penn State faculty in agronomy and animal science, along with personnel of the Soil Conservation Service, demonstrated the field lab's pasture and grazing program to about 140 visitors who toured the lab during Penn State Livestock Day on October 19.

"Pasture is the cheapest source of livestock feed, but all too often Pennsylvania livestock operations run out of pasture in midsummer and must rely on stored feed for the rest of the season. Our purpose is to demonstrate ways of extending the grazing season for beef and sheep into the winter," said Sid Bosworth, Penn State Extension agronomist for forage crops.

From March through July, the cows and calves graze on orchardgrass or tall fescue. Then the field lab uses rape, a brassica crop closely related to turnip, for

grazing heifers from late August through mid-October. "Because brassicas don't have much fiber, the cattle should get enough grass or hay to provide at least one-third of their diet," said Eric Oesterling, associate extension agent from Westmoreland County.

By the time the brassica's are grazed off, tall fescue pastures that were fertilized in August and left to grow are hip deep in lush, high-quality feed. "We've essentially stored the feed in the field, rather than baling it," said Bosworth.

When they graze the stockpiled fescue, the cattle are kept to narrow strips of pasture about 10 or 20 yards wide by the use of portable electric fences made of polywire: the strands are light, flexible combinations of plastic twine and stainless steel wire; the posts may be fiberglass or steel rod.

"Fencing is harvesting equipment, just like the tractor and baler," said Tom Calvert of the Soil Conservation Service. He explained that moving fences into a pasture a little at a time forces the cattle to make the most efficient use of the feed, rather than trampling or wasting parts of it, and the cattle can be easily moved

on to the next strip before overgrazing threatens the ability of the pasture to regrow.

By mid-winter, the cattle reach the final portion of the tall fescue and the fence is moved ahead to make a pair of round hay bales available to them. Two long rows of the round bales sit in the pasture, and every few days the fence is moved again and two more bales made available to the cattle. They can freely choose between the fescue and hay.

"For the winter calving pasture, we put rows of round bales on well-drained ground near the farm headquarters and surround them with fence. That way we can gradually make feed available by moving fence rather than bales. We also set the fence wires high enough that the calves can enter the rows of bales and use them as shelter," said Bill Downs, Superintendent of the field lab.

The field day program included a number of other topics related to livestock grazing. Steven Fales, associate professor of crop science, explained the advantages of birdsfoot trefoil, a legume crop. "It is difficult to establish, but provides a long-lived stand of high-quality forage on sites where alfalfa would not do well," he said.

Les Burdette, professor of animal science extension, discussed how to adjust feed rations so that cows maintain the proper weight to stay healthy through winter and calve properly. Clair Engle, associate professor of animal science extension, explained that good winter nutrition is even more important to ewes than it is to cows. He also emphasized the value of forage analysis. "Forage with over 16

percent crude protein is as good as grain," he said.

Recommendations for fighting disease and parasites in beef and sheep were presented by Tom Drake, extension veterinarian. Drake emphasized the importance of preventive medicine, and suggested that winter was a good time for farmers to get together with their veterinarians, assess the past year, and prepare for the next.

Wiswall named to DHIA post

ITHACA, NY. - Thomas Wiswall has accepted the position of director of field services for staff recruitment and special projects. Wiswall is responsible for recruitment, selection, and training of new DHI records supervisors. He also coordinates half of the regional managers and is creating a statewide relief system.

Wiswall, who lived in Manlius, NY, was a New York DHI

supervisor for three years. In 1980, he became the Regional Manager of Madison, Onondaga, Cortland, and Tompkins Counties. He has three years of dairy farm experience and a bachelor of science degree from Cornell University in animal science. He also earned a master of business administration from Syracuse University.

Wiswall replaces Jack VanAlmelo, who has been named director of Marketing for New York DHI.

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