

Pasture Improvement

At Ag Progress Days

A pasture demonstration on the Ag Progress Day's soil and water conservation tour will show that good grazing can be available throughout the summer season. According to Sid Bosworth, Penn State Extension Agronomist, full season pasture is possible with proper grazing management, adequate fertilization and the right choice of forage species and variety.

Cattle will be grazing on warm season grasses on the demonstration area pastures. Cool season grasses will be putting on growth for fall pasturing.

Cool season grasses include reed canarygrass and tall fescue. Reed canarygrass is very hardy and can grow on wet soils. Even though reed canarygrass can be as digestible as other grasses, it generally has a lower palatability. However, two new varieties, Palaton and Venture, have been released and are commercially available. In limited feeding trials these varieties have demonstrated much greater palatability and increased animal gains, reports Bosworth.

Tall fescue is a cool season grass which grows under a wide range of conditions. However, tall fescue has often been associated with poor animal performance and other health related problems. Recently research has found that much of the poor health performance on tall fescue can be attributed to a fungus which grows inside the plant -- called an endophyte. An improved endophyte-free variety such as Kenhy, Johnstone or Festtorina offer a higher quality pasture plant.

Warm season grasses such as switchgrass and big bluestem grow best in higher temperatures. They are most productive from mid-June to the end of August.

Warm season grasses are efficient users of nitrogen and potash and are drought tolerant.

The addition of warm season grasses to a pasture system more evenly distribute forage over the growing season. This enables livestock producers to develop a grazing season that better meets the nutritional needs of beef cattle in July and August.

More information about these grasses and other forages can be obtained on the soil and water conservation tour and at the forage tent at Penn State's Ag Progress Days, Rock Springs Research Farms, August 18-20.

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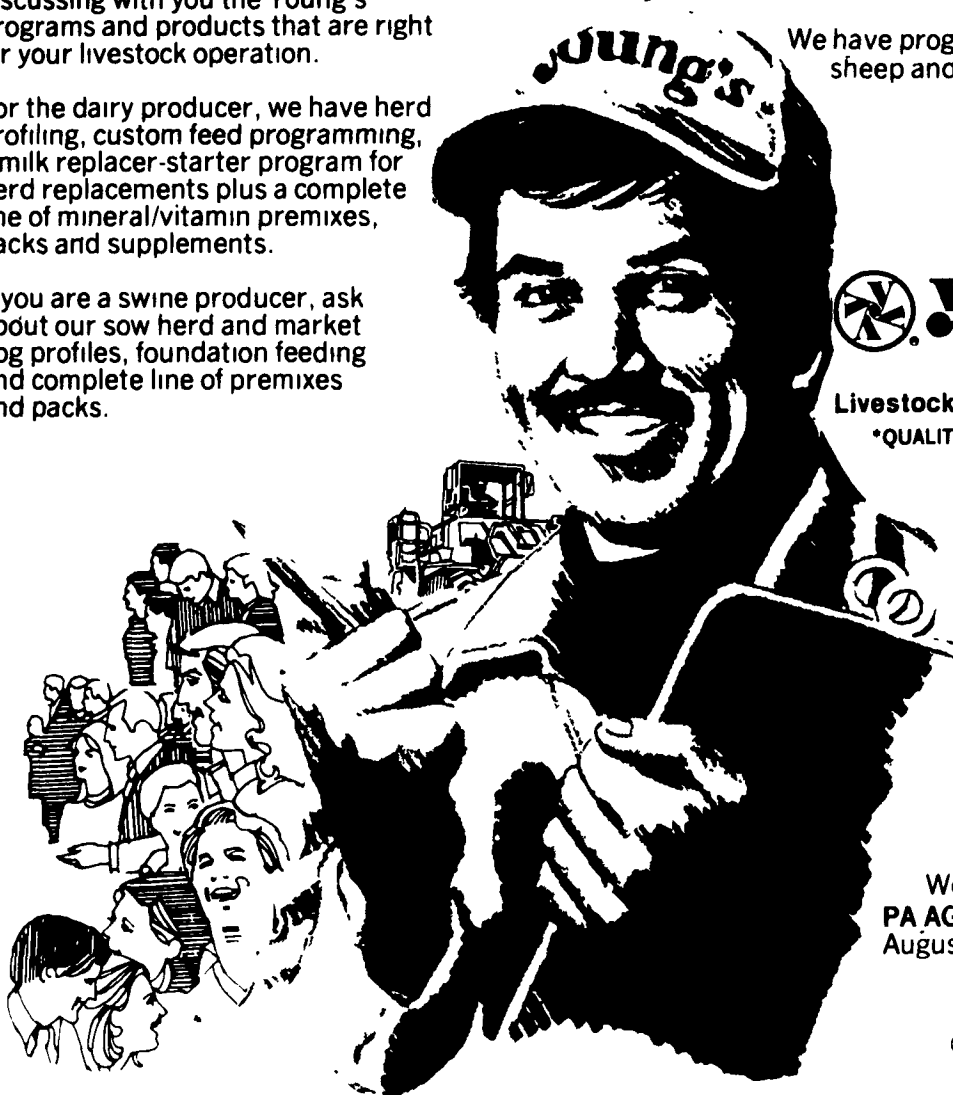
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