

Grazing Of Alfalfa May Prove Beneficial To Farmers

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MOUNT JOY (Lancaster Co.) — Some areas in Pennsylvania and different sections of Maryland — where the land is more rolling — may be more conducive to rotational grazing of alfalfa rather than mechanically harvesting it.

But the farmer who wants to graze alfalfa — which may provide an inexpensive way to harvest hay for high quality forage — must learn new management strategies, according to Dick Kauffman, research agronomist with W-L Research, Inc.

Kauffman is working on a test plot that will study the effects of alfalfa under intense pasture grazing. Varieties will be chosen to see how they endure the stress of stocking and being grazed in a shorter time span than mechanical harvesting.

According to Kauffman, the results can determine a variety to be selected in the future that best suits rotational grazing.

Way to go

"I have talked to, heard several people talking about, and read some articles about farmers who have done some alfalfa grazing and they feel read good about it," said Kauffman. "They feel that it's the way to go — you don't need to invest in machinery."

But for farmers to get the most production out of grazing, they have to stock the fields correctly and know how to rotate the cattle on a timely basis. Also, good site selection, where the soil is well drained, fertile, and can withstand grazing is important.

The Mount Joy test site is less than a half acre, but includes several experimental lines of the W-L trifoliate alfalfa (three leaves, with increased protein and other forage nutrient attributes). The company is trying to breed for grazing tolerance, and the site allows them to see the response to varieties and how the stand maintains under grazing pressure.

The company has been exploring grazing varieties for the past 8-10 years, according to Kauffman. Experiments in Argentina, South America — where grazing is the chief method of harvesting alfalfa — have provided some important data about yield selection.

Graze longer

"Most of the alfalfa in Argentina is grazed," said Kauffman. "They graze it rather than spend all the time making hay and storing it. But they don't have the severe winters as we do here in the upper U.S., so they can graze a little longer in the fall."

In Argentina, the alfalfa fields are allowed to recover about one month — the same as the U.S. "They don't feel that it's any more labor intensive to go out there and move cattle around every day than it is to bale hay."

In southeastern Pennsylvania, however, the farms are intensively managed. Many of the farms already have the equipment.

But for farmers starting out, or who do not have the capital and machinery to invest in mechanical harvesting, rotational grazing may be one way to harvest alfalfa.

See how it works

"We want to see how it works here," said Kauffman. "While we don't think grazing is going to be popular in Lancaster County, there are some places that it will. Most

of the cows here aren't even out on pasture — they're in the freestall barn most of the day. But there are some states where farmers do graze their alfalfa, but they're using just a regular alfalfa. We were hoping that we could develop something that's going to persist a little bit better and also produce lots of pounds of beef per acre (or whatever they're grazing)."

Another factor is that, during harvesting, leaves are often lost from the plant. Perhaps, said Kauffman, if the cow or steer is actually grazing the stand, there may be less leaf loss.

Kauffman said he is looking forward to grazing the test plot this year "just to look at the ground after they've grazed to see how much loss there's been," he said. The agronomist will look at factors such as trampling and how the varieties endure the stress of the cattle in the field.

Steers, which W-L examined last year, grazed alfalfa to about 1½ inches in height. Sheep tend to graze it "right against the ground," he said. Cows this year will be looked to see how much alfalfa they graze. The stand recovery period (normally 30-35 days) will be reduced to about 14-21 days to examine the effects of that type of stress on the plant.

Plot seeded

The trial plot was seeded in 1990. The plot will be maintained four years, and then be plowed under and reseeded.

In the meantime, Kauffman will continue to run tests on it, and observe which varieties stand tough.

"Alfalfa will produce fairly well, even under drier conditions," he said. "Whereas cool-season grass production declines in July and August, when temperatures rise and moisture is limiting. Alfalfa's going to hang in there and produce something — at least that's our feeling."

Farmers must be cautious about certain factors if they are going to graze alfalfa, however. One of those concerns is bloat, caused by gases emitted during digestion of alfalfa.

Manage bloat

Kauffman said, "You need to manage bloat — that's always a factor when grazing alfalfa. So either you need to feed them something to prevent bloat, or manage it in such a way that it's not a problem."

Kauffman said that farmers should give the cattle lots of grass — particularly dry hay. Mixing the grass seed in with the alfalfa at planting will not be enough, because cattle need the dry grass to absorb the gases. Or farmers can pasture the cattle on grass beforehand.

"Until we have a bloat-resistant alfalfa, farmers are going to need to watch bloat very closely if they are grazing alfalfa," he said.

Kauffman said that if farmers intend to graze alfalfa, several factors should be considered:

- Sow the alfalfa on the kinds of fields that you would normally sow your alfalfa — well-drained, with good soil quality.

- Stock heavily and manage the field intensely, making sure to graze it with intensity. When the stand is grazed to about 1½ inches high, rotate the cattle to another field. Allow the field to recover to next grazing.

- Choose a disease- and insect-resistant variety with adequate graz-



Steers graze an alfalfa plot near Mount Joy. Dick Kauffman, research agronomist with W-L Research, Inc., is working on a test plot that will study the effects of alfalfa under intense pasture grazing. Varieties will be chosen to see how they endure the stress of stocking and being grazed in a shorter time span than mechanical harvesting.

ing capability.

- Manage bloat — either feed a bloat reducer or dry grass hay to the cattle.

- Introduce other elements into the feeding program as well, including total mixed rations, to maintain a healthy dietary balance.

- Read up on the latest information and keep in touch with your county extension agent on the latest in rotational grazing using alfalfa.

Farmers benefit

Kauffman believes that some farmers can benefit from alfalfa grazing. "I think the possibility is there," he said. "I think that because you don't need to invest in equipment, certainly putting a temporary, movable fence up is a lot cheaper than a hay baler, a couple of wagons, and a tractor."

Kauffman said that for someone who does not want to invest in

expensive equipment, "grazing certainly is a lot cheaper than harvesting it for haylage or for baled hay.

"Not to say that grazing is less productive," he said. "Grazing . . . requires much better management. You've got to move your cattle. Whether that's sheep or cows or steers or goats, you've got to move them, and you've got to watch them."

Genesee Country Museum Features Big Wheels

MUMFORD, N. Y. — All kinds of wheels will be featured at Genesee Country Museum on June 8 and June 9 . . .

. . . spinning wheels and carriage wheels, that is.

Located in Mumford, New York, about 20 miles southwest, the Genesee Country Museum is a collection of 57 shops, homes and farm buildings which have been moved to the museum site, arranged in a village setting, restored to their original use and furnished with appropriate antiques.

Costumed interpreters and craftspeople inside most buildings discuss 19th century life and times with visitors.

The museum also features the Gallery of Sporting Art, the largest collection of wildlife art in North America; four gift shops; and the Carriage Museum, a collection of more than 40 antique carriages and sleighs.

Saturday's "Spin-In," centered in the museum's Exhibition Hall, will see over 100 spinners and weavers demonstrate the 19th century art of spinning wool on a wide variety of wheels, then weaving that wool into sturdy, warm fabric.

Several regional sheep-to-shawl teams will engage in friendly competition to determine how quickly they can take a pile of raw wool, card it, tease it, spin it and weave it into a shawl, 18 inches wide by 80 inches long.

A local sheep shearer, Dan Swartz, will demonstrate how the whole process begins by shearing a sheep every hour on the hour, beginning at 11 a.m.

A variety of spinning-oriented items will be offered for sale by area vendors including natural

yarns, sheepskin, dyes, spindles, angora goat and shephorn buttons and niddy-noddys.

Music to spin by will be provided by the Bushnell's Basin Delegation, beginning at 11:30 a.m.

Sunday, June 9, will see dozens of wheels attached to antique carriages as they drive through the streets of the museum's historic village and test the ability of horse and driver alike in competition on the Great Meadow.

The day begins early with a pleasure drive through the countryside surrounding the village museum.

Then, beginning about 11 a.m., the drivers will finish the timed competition by driving through the streets of the museum's historic village. Many visitors take this opportunity to photograph the restored carriages against the backdrop of the restored buildings in the 19th century village.

In early afternoon, competition will begin in rings set up on the museum's Great Meadow.

The competitions will include "Fault and Out" and "Gambler's Choice" and are designed to test

the skill and patience of both horse and driver.

Total points from all three events will be tallied and the entry with the highest score will receive the Dr. William Howe Memorial Trophy. Dr. Howe was an enthusiastic supporter of Genesee Country Museum and the events which centered around horses.

All events of each day of the weekend are included in the regular museum admission of \$9 for adults, \$6 for youth 13 through 17; and \$4.50 for children six through 12.

Children five and under and museum members are admitted at no charge.

The museum opens at 10 a.m. and closes at 5 p.m. every weekend throughout the season. Weekday hours are 10 a.m. until 4 p.m., Tuesday through Friday, in May, June, September and October and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, in July and August.

There are two restaurants in operation on the museum site, and picnic tables are available at no charge. Parking is abundant and free.

