

Grazing Can Be Long-Lasting, Effective Feed Source If Managed Properly

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Lancaster Farming Staff
And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle that thou mayest eat and be full.

Deuteronomy 11:15
BETWEEN OXFORD AND KIRKWOOD (Lancaster Co.) — To about 85 farmers who attended a tour of the Lindenhof Guernsey Farm here last week, the grazing season may be long enough, indeed.

Through the heavy heat and humidity, visitors took off their straw hats to use handkerchiefs to wipe away sweat from a blazing sun. It looked to be a typical summer day.

A few days before, about two inches of rain fell heavily on the 50 acres of pasture that the 56-cow herd uses at various times throughout the season.

While some farmers shy away from grazing the animals because of the "short" season, for those at the Lindenhof Farm (managed by the brother-sister partnership of Axel and Millie Linde), the season can last from late February well into November.

With a little common-sense rumen management and knowledge about feed, dairy farmers can take advantage of the relatively long grazing season that exists in some areas of southeastern Pennsylvania and Maryland.

When grazing alfalfa, the important thing to remember, according to Millie Linde, is that "when a cow leaves the barn, she's not to be super-hungry. Let her have some dry hay in her so when she's gone out here, she doesn't attack it like she would candy. It is candy to her, and you keep her under control by having some dry matter in her."

The Lindes have used grazing in their operation for more than 40 years. Axel and Millie use a combination of grazing techniques, including a passive system which allows the cattle to move by themselves from the barn into a "pentagon" area that links five separate, permanent pasture fields. The gates are open so that, whenever they want to, the cows can make their way onto some newly seeded mixed alfalfa stands, chicory stands, or hay mixtures.

The Lindes also use a "back-



The importance of dry hay in pasture rations is critical, according to Leslie Yoder, herd nutritionist. It's important for the herd manager to be flexible in feeding cows and to properly balance the grazing.

fencing" technique using fiberglass posts and multistranded polywire to move cattle around in some of the paddocks. This intensive rotational grazing system ensures that the feed is available in the right amounts and is managed correctly.

The pasture areas "have been forever and ever pasture," said Axel. One alfalfa field is still producing well into its fifth year.

The Lindes have to control some weed problems, mostly Canada thistle and horsenettle. Also, when leafhoppers become evident, some pesticides have to be used.

They also grow corn mostly for corn silage. The remainder is used for high-moisture corn.

In the Linde's grazing operation, on one side of the farm, three alfalfa fields measure about 1½ acres each. The cows graze them only at night, three nights each.

They graze at night, according to Millie, because of the lack of trees for shade.

Water is provided to portable water tanks, each costing about \$40, that hold 25 gallons each. Water is pumped from a main well near the house.

In some of the fields, volunteer clover also grows, which can be an important feed source, according to grazing experts. "Some years, cows like clover better, other years

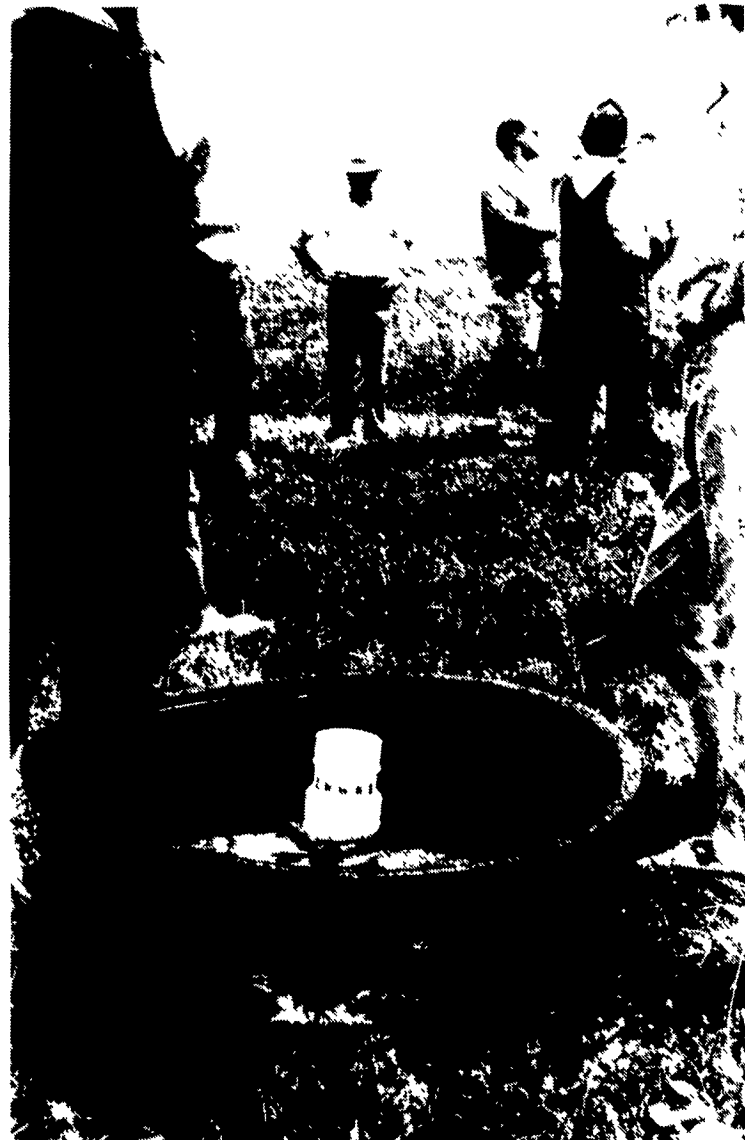
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The Lindes also placed some tall fescue near one of the barns at the Lindenhof Farm. The fescue was installed to help retain soil, but for grazing, the cows like it only when it is young, according to Axel.



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Two young farmers don plastic boots for biosecurity on the tour of Lindenhof Farm. Here, chicory is grazed about four times in the season. It is cut after the second and fourth grazing. The cut materials (100 bales off of a two-acre parcel) are used for helper bedding, according to Axel.



A young farmer waits through a discussion of the watering tanks to get to dinner after the grazing field day.