

LIVESTOCK ♦ NOTES

Extend The Grazing Season

Agronomists Marvin H. Hall and Jerry Jung, assistant professor and adjunct professor, respectively at Penn State University have prepared an excellent publication, Agronomy Facts 41, entitled "Strategies for Extending the Grazing Season."

You can obtain Agronomy Facts 41 from your local extension office for the details and nitty gritty of extending the grazing season.

Several strategies can be employed to supply forage into the fall or early winter and effectively extend the grazing season by 60 to 90 days, thus reducing the need for stored feeds. These strategies can be categorized into two major

groups: 1) stockpiling (conserving cool-season forages in late-summer for use in the fall and winter), or 2) utilizing forage crops that continue to grow in the fall and early winter.

Not all cool-season species are adapted to stockpiling. Most species reduce their growth in the fall because of shorter day lengths and/or they lose their leaves (quality) after being frosted. Tall fescue and birdsfoot trefoil are two forage species which are suited to stockpile management because they continue to grow in the fall and do not lose leaves as readily as other cool-season species do after frost.

Tall Fescue

Tall fescue is a deep-rooted, long-lived, sod-forming grass that spreads by short underground stems called rhizomes. It is

drought resistant and will maintain itself under rather limited fertility conditions. Animals readily graze tall fescue during the fall, but show some reluctance to graze it during the summer months of July and August.

Some of the reduced summer palatability, which results in poor animal performance, is associated with the presence of a fungus in the plant (endophytic). Endophyte-free varieties are now available and are recommended for new seeding. Tall fescue is the best adapted cool-season grass for stockpiling.

Birdsfoot Trefoil

Birdsfoot trefoil is a perennial legume adapted to production on poorly drained, low pH soils. It can reseed itself, is resistant to Phytophthora root rot and numerous alfalfa insects, responds well to fertilization, and does not cause bloat in animals.

These characteristics have expanded its use in the northern United States and southern Canada where the production of other forage legumes is limited. Birdsfoot trefoil is well suited for stockpiling since it holds its leaves at maturity and after frost, thus maintaining a relatively high level

of quality.

Fall Growing Forage Crops

The growth of some forage species is not as adversely affected by cooler fall weather and shorter day lengths as are many cool-season forages. The species which seem to grow best in the fall are tall fescue, prairie grass, perennial ryegrass, and certain brassica crops. These species can provide a valuable feed supply for extending the grazing season.

Prairie Grass

Prairie grass is a tall growing perennial grass that is suited to well drained soils with medium to high fertility levels and a pH of 6.0 or greater. It is a type of bromegrass, but is different from smooth bromegrass in that it does not have rhizomes and it produces seed heads in each growth period, especially during the summer. Herbage and immature seed heads of prairie grass are highly palatable. It is an excellent grass for providing forage during droughts and for extending the grazing season well into the fall in Pennsylvania.

Forage Brassicas

Brassicas are annual crops which continue to grow during the fall and into the winter. They are highly productive and digestible and contain relatively high levels of crude protein. They can be grazed 80 to 150 days after seeding, depending on the species and weather. In addition, some varieties lend themselves to stockpiling.

Small Grains

The use of winter cereal crops such as wheat, barley, rye, or triticale can provide fall or early winter grazing opportunities. How-

ever, certain management practices need to be modified from what is normally done for grain production. When small grains are to be used for grazing, plant them three to four weeks earlier than for grain production. Increase the seeding rate to 3 bushels/acre and apply nitrogen at the rate of 40 pounds/acre at planting time.

If the small grains are being planted only for pasture (with no subsequent grain harvest), there may be some benefit to mixing small grains species. This has been beneficial in the southeast United States, where small grains pastures are quite common. Mixing species of rye, wheat, barley, or triticale can help extend the grazing period and reduce the tendency for a strong peak growth period in the spring.

With adequate fall moisture, grazing should be available from October through December and then again in early spring. One acre of properly fertilized and managed small grains should support one animal unit (1,000-pound animal) on a limited grazing basis.

Stocking rate and time of grazing will be somewhat determined by the intended use of the crop. If you are planning to take a silage or grain harvest, grazing should only be moderate. Heavy grazing can reduce grain yields. Moderate grazing in the fall will not result in significant silage or grain losses provided that moisture and soil fertility are adequate. In fact, fall pasturing can be beneficial where the small grain was seeded early and has made excessive growth.

Spring grazing may be started when growth resumes.



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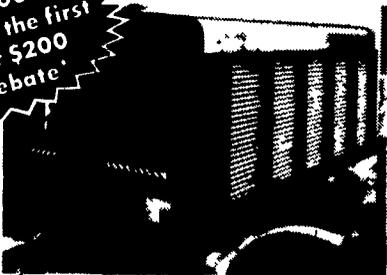
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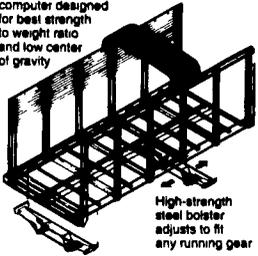
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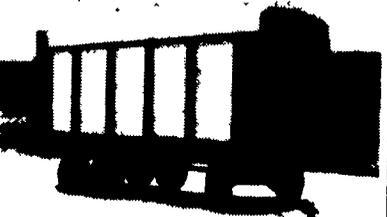
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