

Grazing Livestock

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about the operation.

As another example of the type of thinking that goes along with grazing, Henning said that whenever any forage or grain crop is harvested, whether by animal or machine, a priority consideration should automatically be how the field is going to come back — what will likely happen with the plants and how that can be used to feed cattle and make milk.

He said some people are fearful of grazing new seedlings, or establish a stand for grazing, but let it go until the following year to allow it to thicken.

Henning said that grazing will help stimulate tiller growth and that first seedlings should never be cut, but should always be grazed.

Others who spoke, such as Calvert, urged the audience to think, to consider, to become aware of details and at the same time keep the entire operation in mind.

Stored feeds are a must with a dairy grazing operation. What that stored feed is can vary.

Some report continuing to feed a TMR year-round, offering it while the cows are being milked.

Others only resort to stored feeds temporarily during drought and again when snow depth, or plant condition prevents grazing into the winter.

Even Henning said he offers his cows an opportunity to grab a mouthfull or so of a round bale of hay while they exit from milking back out to graze.

Sacrifice lots are used but kept to a minimum. Walkways are suggested to be about 30-foot wide and planted with grasses that the cows can graze on their way to the paddock of the day or night.

Henning said that to set up a grazing situation, the amount of land to be grazed should be divided into thirds, no matter what the amount of land.

That's because of the number of days it takes (depending on season and weather) for the grasses and forages to recover to the optimum 6- to 8-inch height — generally described as the length of a lawn that is just past mowing to be cut. A measuring stick can be used.

Estimates on tonnage can also be derived from certain measuring techniques, to figure consumption, and the rate of consumption depends on how much land the cattle are allowed to graze in a certain amount of time to achieve the optimum graze down.

While all said that grazing took more management and observation, they said they generally enjoyed the challenge of monitoring the farm's plants, animals and weather and responding with a plan.

Over time, as situations arise, experience should help quicken the decision making process, and help prepare the manager for occasional or rare conditions.

For example, Henning said he has areas on his farm that he specifically manages with the intent that it could come into play for such things as winter grazing or winter shelter.

He also feeds stored feeds, but keeps the feeding simple, such as presenting sweet corn silage or cut hay in a way that makes the cows eat from the bottom up, instead of from top down. He said that it helps eliminate waste and mess.

Advantages of grazing includes such things as reduced manure hauling, reduced barn cleaning, reduced tilling, planting, spraying and harvesting. The elimination of the need for some equipment and facilities also reduces overhead.

Forrest Stricker distributed a cost analysis of his operation comparing his previous costs with a confinement system to his current grazing incorporated system.

He was able to add 10 additional cows, and while the average production per cow fell, his pounds of milk sold increased. His income from the sale of cows and calves, crops and beef dropped, but his calculations showed an increased income (incoming cash) of \$442.

What made the big difference and gave him an increased profit of \$24,557 was the reduction in expenses.

He decreased his total feed cost expenses by \$17,641, according to his comparisons. He included expenses for fuel and lubricants, fertilizer and compost, custom work, machinery repair, crop seed and spray, pasture seed, fence, water, and purchased feeds.

Except for his increased cost of pasture seed, fencing, and water, he was able to significantly reduce all other feed costs.

His other operation expenses — such as vet bills, electricity in the barn, supplies and bedding, labor, breeding, and equipment depreciation — all went down. For him by more than \$7,000.

He calculated that his profit per cow increase by \$372, while his profit per hundredweight milk sold increased by \$2.03.



He grazes seven months of the year.

Whether or not grazing fits into an existing operation is specific to that operation, its assets and people skills.

Calvert told the group that they already have most of the things they need to incorporate grazing successfully, what they need to do next is to consider everything and how it can be used as it is without making work for the grazer.

"Know the plants and plant management, the animals and animal management and use them," Calvert said. "But remember, as a grazer, the money you make is mostly from the things you already have."

Or as some other have put, the money made is the money not spent.

For more information about the Lancaster County Grazers, contact Arden Landis at (717) 529-6644.

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