

# Grazing Gazette

PENNSTATE

College of Agricultural Sciences  
in cooperation with USDA/ARS



(Continued from Page D5)

pasture intake more slowly and helps the rumen adapt. Start grazing animals as early as possible. Maintaining a high dry matter intake should always be your first goal, so keep enough high quality feed (TMR, stored forages, etc.) available, especially when beginning to graze. Remember that cattle do not graze as closely to the ground as sheep, so what may look like an abundance of green growth to you may actually be unavailable to the cow. Adequate feed available in the barn also helps to minimize the risk of bloat, especially with legume pastures.

As the animal's dry matter intake increases, the amount of stored feed that is refused will increase somewhat proportionally. For every pound of dry matter refused from TMR or high quality forage, the cow is eating about a pound of dry matter from pasture or about 5-7 pounds of wet material. Spring pasture is about 15-20 percent dry matter and generally higher in protein and energy and lower in fiber than most stored forages. Plan ahead by working with your nutritionist to decide how often your rations will need to be adjusted.

It is best to avoid very frequent ration changes, because they can upset the rumen environment. However, a decline in milk production is easy to avoid by balancing a new ration ahead of time based on estimated changes in pasture intake, rather than making "off the cuff" feed changes. Remember to monitor production, average daily milk production per daily cow or gain per animal for livestock, in order to assess whether your feeding management is effective. With higher grain prices, it is especially important to also monitor changes in feed costs per unit of production (cwt. of milk or pound of grain). Watch for overfeeding of grain as TMR changes with spring grazing. Lactating dairy cows should not be consuming more than 2.5 percent of BW from concentrate. Watch for underfeeding of grain as TMR changes with spring grazing. Drops in milk production and body condition score will

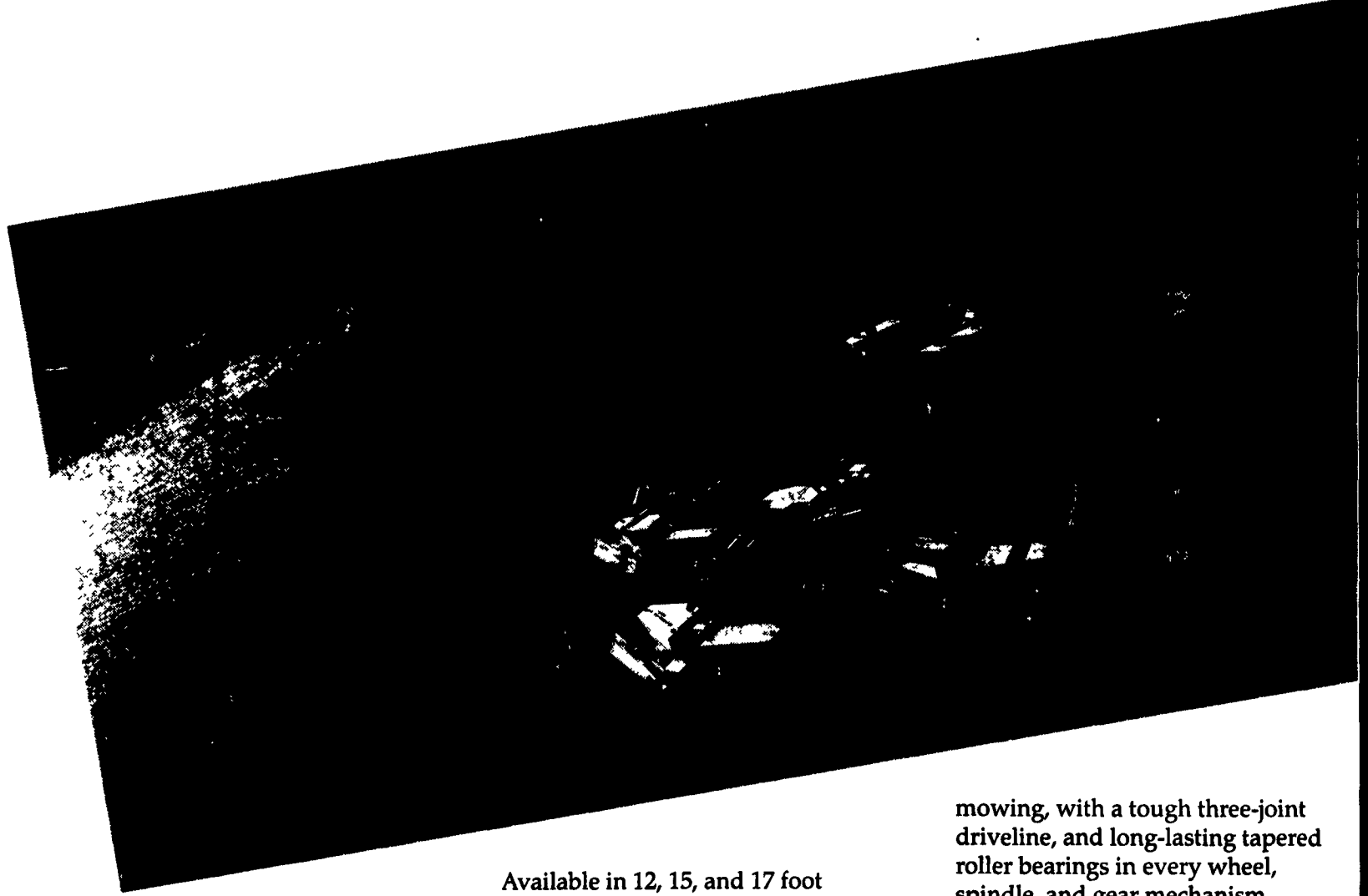
result from low energy (low grain) rations.

One final word on feeding impact with spring grazing relates to effective fiber in the ration. Lush spring pasture is often low in neutral detergent fiber (NDF), and rations with finely chopped silages and little or no long hay can

result in off-feed problems, rumen acidosis, displaced abomasums, and low fat tests. Monitoring particle size of the TMR, monitoring NDF of the entire ration and using some long hay in the diet can go a long way in solving some of these problems. Work with your feed consultant to find a formula

that works for you! Spring can be a very challenging time, especially for new graziers. It takes some intensive management of both the plants and animals to navigate the rough spots, reach your goals, and get a great start grazing those pastures!

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