



**THE GRASS IS GREEN AND GROWING**

Larry Muller

Penn State University

The interest in and movement "back to grazing" continues to increase.

As has often been said, grazing is not going back to the "good old days," but is upgrading an old technology that may be tight for economical and environmental reasons.

Beef and sheep producers have had grazing systems for years, whereas the movement back to grazing with dairy has occurred primarily during the past 6-7 years. Management intensive grazing is not for everyone, and not everyone who adopts a pasture-based system will be successful. However, with good animal and grazing management, grazing provides an alternative that may improve profitability and lifestyle.

**Grazing Meetings**

Attendance and enthusiasm has been high at most local, state, and regional meetings. About 200 attended the recent two-day Pennsylvania Grazing Conference in Carlisle. There were many timely presentations on paddock layout, fencing systems, managing heat stress, reproductive management, feed budgeting, nutrition, production beef from forage, and many others. Several different producers participated in the program.

If you are interested in obtaining copies of the Proceedings of the 1997 Grazing Conference, send \$10 made payable to Penn State University and send to the address at the end of this column.

Grazing meetings and pasture walks are being held on a regular basis in several regions of Pennsylvania. The "walks" and discussion groups are excellent places to exchange ideas and learn more about pasture-based systems. We encourage all groups to send us dates and locations of these

meetings so we can publish a regular grazing calendar with this column.

We plan to continue publishing a column every few weeks in this Grazing Gazette column. We want the articles to be timely and informative. Please let us know by calling any topics of interest to you (814) 865-6541, or by e-mail, sed1@psu.edu. Our fax number is (814) 863-7043. Our goal is to provide for your individual needs for you to be even more successful in your business.

**The Grass Is Getting Greener  
Grazing Tips**

One of the most critical and challenging times in the grazing season is the spring. An often used quote from New Zealand is that "the difference between an above average farmer and an average farmer is about two weeks." This is two weeks in the spring. Proper management of pastures in the spring "sets the stage" for pasture growth and proper rotation through paddocks. Spring pasture management requires a lot of forward thinking and quick action.

Pasture growth has been relatively slow this spring with the cool temperatures. However, the rapid spring grass growth will occur at one time and then all grass will have similar maturity. By the time you read this article in press, most pastures should have been grazed except perhaps for the northern areas. Here are some successful tips for successful spring pasture management.

•Start early. Cows should be turned onto pasture after green up or when there is two to three inches of growth. Do not wait until the first paddock is seven to eight inches tall because all of the paddock are seven to eight inches tall. Continue feeding the cows their normal winter ration, and begin to decrease feeding the barn.

•Move fast. A goal should be to top graze every paddock that is to be

grazed in the spring and not set aside for harvesting. A good goal is to top graze each paddock during the first seven to 10 days. During this time you are "staging the paddocks" to different maturities for later grazing and to avoid all paddocks being ready to graze at the same time. Cows are gradually increasing pasture intake and decreasing stored forage intake. This practice also helps to gradually adapt the rumen of the cow to a change in feedstuff.

If pasture growth gets ahead of the harvesting by cows, more of the paddocks may need to be set aside for mechanical harvesting. If unneeded paddocks are harvested early, they can be returned to the pasture system early. As a "rule of thumb" for milking cows, you may only need one acre of pasture for each 1½ to 2 milking cows during the rapid spring pasture growth.

•Keep dry matter high. Spring pasture is highly palatable, is about 15% dry matter, and is higher in protein and energy than most stored forages. During the early spring pasture growth, we want to gradually adapt the cows and the rumen environment to the new pasture. With dairy, our goal is to maintain a high DMI and high milk production. We want to gradually decrease the stored forage as pasture intake decreases. We still want to maintain a reasonable level of grain feeding similar to what is being fed in the barn for the early lactation cow. Some long fiber (hay) can help pro-

vide adequate, effective fiber that may be lacking in lush spring pastures and adds some dry forage to the wet pasture diet. Adding extra magnesium to the grain ration can help prevent grass tetany.

•Walk pastures daily. Walk all paddocks daily to visually observe pasture growth. When pasture growth is in excess of the cow's ability to keep up with it, you should consider removing some of the paddocks from the rotation for hay or silage. In addition to visually observing the pastures, feed refusals and change in refusals at the feed bank should be monitored.

Spring is a challenging time for "old" and "new" graziers. It takes excellent management of plants and animals to get that good start to grazing. Happy grazing.

**Grazing Center**

One of the goals of the Grazing Center is to coordinate educational activities and disseminate information on grassland agriculture. Please let us know of various grazing activities, meetings, and pasture walks during the upcoming grazing season. We will publish these activities in a Grazing Calendar at the end of the Grazing Gazette column.

Please contact us at the Grazing Research and Education Center, c/o Sue Eisenhauer, 116 Agricultural Sciences and Industries Building, University Park, PA 16802, fax (814) 863-7043, or Larry Muller, phone (814) 863-4205, and e-mail lmuller@das9.cas.psu.edu.

**Improved Red Clover**

Jimmy C. Henning,  
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"THOU SHALT SEED CERTIFIED SEED OF AN IMPROVED VARIETY" is imprinted in the fine print of every practicing agronomist's diploma, along with things like "soil test regularly," "rotate crops," and "conserve soil." However, in times of price crunches, everyone truly becomes a cost-cutter and bargain hunter just to continue to be profitable.

One area that perennially comes

under close scrutiny is that of the price of the seed of better varieties of forage legumes. With the down prices of cattle, this scrutiny of seed costs will get even more intense.

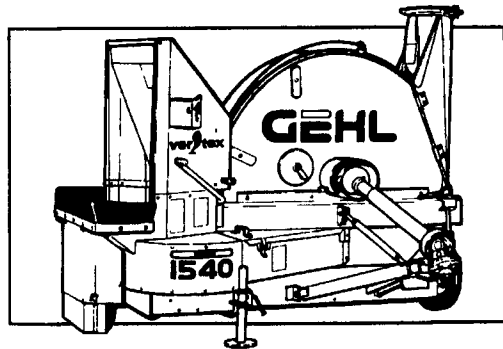
But what is the true value of using better seed?

This article will examine the value of better red clover and alfalfa varieties, based on data collected from the variety testing program at the University of Kentucky.

To get to the point, seeding certified seed of red clover and alfalfa does pay, and the data are convincing, consistent, and significant. But let's look

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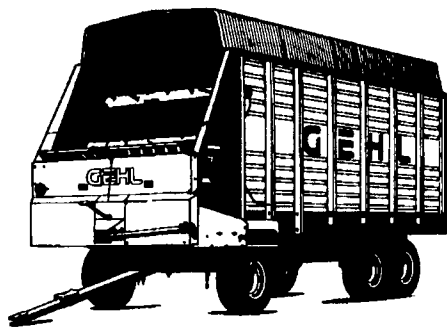


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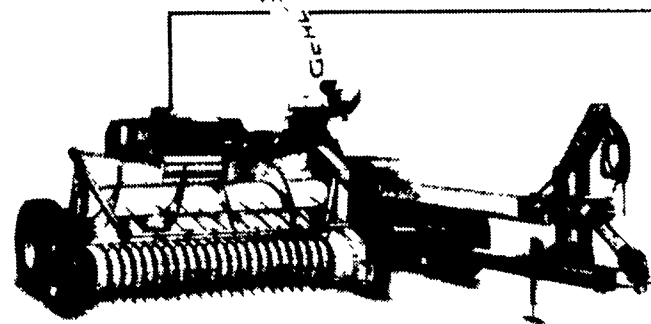
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