

USDA, State Agricultural Agencies To Demonstrate Warm-Season Grass Grazing Methods

ROCKSPRING (Centre Co.) — Beef producers and other livestock managers can see how farms can use warm-season grasses as summer forages at a field demonstration tour at Ag Progress Days, Aug. 15-17.

A five-acre switchgrass pasture will be fenced and separated into paddocks as a herd of seven Angus cow-calf pairs graze on the pasture. The grazing demonstration marks the first time cattle have been part of an Ag Progress Days technology tour. The bus tour is scheduled at 2 p.m. daily, leaving from the Soil Conservation Tent at the Natural Resources Conservation Partnership area on West 11th Street.

"It is a hands-on grazing seminar for people who are thinking of developing a grazing program," explained Bill Stout, soil scientist in the USDA Pasture Systems and Watershed Management Laboratory. "We are using beef cows for this demonstration, but the methods and technology can be applied to any

grazing animal — sheep, horses, or dairy cows."

The tour will show producers how to estimate how much forage is available to grazing herds, what percentage of forage will be used by the herd, and how much pasture to allocate for a specific time period.

Visitors also will learn how to manage animal herds on pastureland. USDA animal scientist Kathy Soder will talk on grazing animal management principles.

"We also are going to talk about how to structure your pasture so that shade areas, mineral blocks, and water sources are separated enough so that cattle will not congregate in one area," Soder said. "If cattle remain in one place, it can promote disease and parasites within the herd and concentrate manure nutrients."

Three grasslands specialists from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service — Jim Cropper, J.B. Harrold and Duane Pysher — will talk on

how best to use pasture grasses and how to use warm-season grasses to complement an animal grazing program.

Warm-season grasses — which include switchgrass, indiangrass, Eastern gamma grass and big bluestem — grow from mid-May to late August.

"Warm-season grasses can grow in low-fertility soils and have a deep root system that allows them to reach and utilize water that other grasses cannot," Stout said. "Warm-season grasses such as switchgrass contain a lot of fiber, so they are not pasture grasses for high-producing dairy cows, but they can support beef cows."

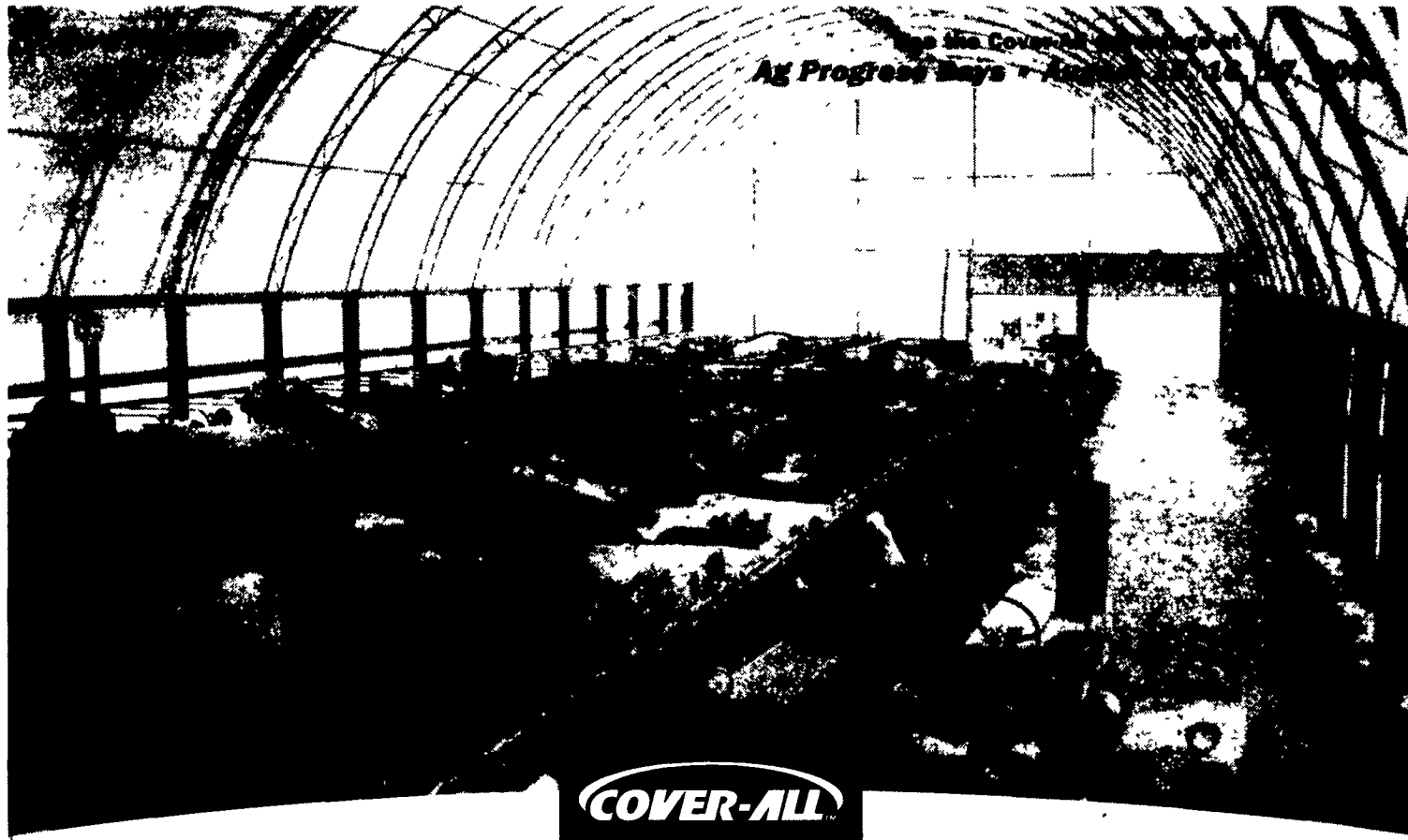
The one-hour demonstration, which will be held on the USDA research farm opposite Gate C on the Russell E. Larson Agricultural Research Center at Rockspring, also will detail how to set up a perimeter fence and create grazing paddocks by using portable electronic fencing.



"The key is to divide the pasture into separate paddocks large enough to support a grazing herd and to know when to move the cattle into a new paddock so that the grasses have a chance to regenerate," Soder said. "Warm-season grasses have been a subject of interest

for many beef producers, particularly in the last few years when drought has been a problem in Pennsylvania."

For more information, call (800) PSU-1010 toll-free or visit the Ag Progress Days site on the World Wide Web at <http://apd.cas.psu.edu>.



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