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Oh, the sight of green on the landscape. What a mental uplift to me, a non-winter person.

The return of green means the 2003 season of Pennsylvania grazing conferences is over. The featured speakers at three of the conferences were the Roche Brothers from Ireland. One of their talks dealt with the subject of the potential for pasture-based grazing dairy farms in the northeastern U.S. They concluded that there is a huge potential for these types of dairy enterprises. But interestingly, they also concluded that the U.S. can learn from the mistakes and successes that other countries have made with their grazing programs, and that you cannot directly transfer their systems into your region. You need to select key management practices from their systems which you can adapt, and then research them as part of your system.

It was interesting to hear them discuss this. All too often we hear that the only ones who know anything about grazing are from the "down under" in New Zealand (N.Z.) or from other foreign countries.

I would agree that N.Z. has done an outstanding job of developing and adapting grazing technologies within their livestock industry. They have done this perhaps better than any other country in the world. Theirs is a ryegrass-based system that uses high

inputs of nitrogen fertilizer. Because of their predominately mild, moist, maritime climate, it works extremely well. However, when the idea comes up that we should adopt their system of grazing without modification and adaptation, I usually cringe. The comments from the Roche brothers made me feel good about my reservations.

Don't get me wrong. I feel we have a lot to learn from their grazing experiences and expertise. I believe that we need to make the proper modifications and adjustments to their ways to make them work within our climate and system limitations. When we are able to do this, we can make a good thing even better. I always think back to comments that my mentor, Tom Calvert, makes regarding grazing systems: "No two systems are exactly the same and if we try to exactly copy one farm's grazing system to another farm, one of those farms will have the wrong system because of the differences that exist between the two farms."

We can adapt key parts of the one system to the other, with modifications to overcome the differences, and have two functioning systems that meet both farms needs.

Another highlight of the Pennsylvania Grazing and Forage Conference was the Pennsylvania Forage and Grassland Council's (PFGC) annual meeting and awards ceremony. The PFGC presented several awards to exceptional individuals involved

with the forage industry in Pennsylvania. One award was PFGC's Special Award presented to David Fink for his many outstanding contributions to PFGC and the hay industry. After Dave accepted his award, he made a few comments to the group and quoted Freeman Dyson, a physics professor at Princeton University. Dyson was one of 100 thinkers who were asked the question "What has been the most important invention of the past 2000 years?" Dyson answered the question with one word and that was "hay."

He went on to explain that in the Old World of Greece and Rome, there was no hay. Their civilization with horses could only exist in warmer climates where there were grasses to graze all year long. Sometime in the Dark Ages, some unknown genius invented hay. The land was managed to grow grass and the process of making hay allowed civilization to move northward into colder winter climates and thus, hay gave birth to London, Paris, Berlin and even New York and the United States. This all came

about because of hay.

It is just hard to imagine what a large role hay has played in the expansion and development of our modern society. Something so simple, but yet so important. It is hard for me, a forage person, to realize how big a part hay played in this expansion. One would have expected the answer to be the computer or penicillin or some other modern-day invention.

I guess you are concluding that I came away from the conferences with some good information and ideas. You are correct. There was much to be learned from all the speakers and presentations. I know that there were more than 450 people in attendance at the three March grazing conferences where the Roche Brothers spoke. There were several other grazing conferences in the state during the year, and I know their attendance was up as well.

There is a lot of interest in grazing and that interest is growing each year. Next year there will be a similar series of grazing conferences and I hope you plan on attending at least one of them. Watch for

the dates of these meetings and conferences in popular press magazines like *Lancaster Farming* and then get registered to attend.

The planning committee meets to decide on the featured speakers for the three grazing conferences (Northwest, PFGC, and Tioga and Bradford within the next few months. Should you have ideas on speakers you would like to hear or topics you would like to learn more about, let me know your thoughts and ideas.

I also would like to ask for ideas on subjects you would like to see me discuss in my column. I enjoy putting my thoughts down on paper. I get feedback from some of you regarding my "Ponderings" but I would like to hear from more of you. Perhaps I can share some of your experiences and stories with others.

In closing, I will share a conversation I had recently with one of my readers. In fact, it was just after the February issue of *Foraging Around* was published. Let's call him Aaron. Aaron tells

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