

Fall Pasture Management Tips

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Late summer is not the time to neglect your pastures. How you manage your pastures during this period will affect the productivity for the remainder of this year and next. Extending the grazing season until Christmas is an achievable goal for anyone, but there are a few important late summer forage management steps to follow if you want to achieve this. The fields that are to be pastured after the end of the growing season need to be given time to grow and accumulate forage for late season stockpile grazing.

What steps can you take now to ensure that there will be stockpiled grazing for the November-December period?

1. Field Selection

The first step is to select the fields that you want to use for stockpiled forage. Choose fields that have a good forage stand and that are reasonably well drained. Grazing during wet fall conditions can be very hard on the plants if the livestock are pugging (leaving deep hoof prints). Stockpile grazing is best achieved in fields where animal movement can be controlled and fresh strips of forage or new paddocks can be provided at least every week, or preferably every few days. If the livestock have uncontrolled access to the entire area, they will selectively graze and after a couple of weeks the forage quality will be greatly diminished.

2. Allow Growth To Accumulate

The second step is to stop grazing the fields that you want to use for late fall stockpile grazing and allow the forage growth to accumulate. This is an important step in the process of setting up a stockpiling system. There must be a sufficient volume of standing forage to provide the livestock with their feed requirements for the intended period. During August and early September, there is still sufficient day length and heat to promote good forage growth, but once we get to late September, the days are shorter and the night-time temperatures low enough that very little growth will occur.

3. Nitrogen Application

The third step applies to grass-based stands. Nitrogen applied in the late summer will stimulate fall growth, allow the plant to develop a strong root system, and also promote top growth that will provide feed for the fall grazing. An application of 50-60 kg/ha of nitrogen will give a positive response.

Allow Trefoil To Set Seed

Trefoil is one of the better legumes for stockpile grazing, as it holds its quality well into the late fall and early winter. Trefoil is a short-lived perennial that can re-seed itself if allowed to flower and fully develop the seedpods. If you have trefoil in your pasture it should be allowed to flower and set seed at sometime during the year. If the trefoil has not had the opportunity to do so, give it a fall rest to allow seed set. The trefoil can then be grazed later in the season after all growth has ceased.

Graze Crop Residues

There are several other ideas that will provide forage for your livestock during the later part of the grazing season. Crop residues can provide excellent quality forage. Don't over look cereal stubble, as there will be some volunteer grain in these fields that can be grazed. The fields could also be seeded with oats or barley immediately after the cereal harvest. If clover was broadcast in the spring for a plowdown cover crop, consider grazing this growth. Corn stalks can provide a great deal of forage after the grain has been harvested.