

Pasture Records?

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Where are your pasture records for the 2001 grazing season? Non-existent? Most of us are notorious for poor record keeping. Yet these notes are essential for the best pasture management decisions.

Pasture is a bit of a strange beast. Lots of rain makes for planting green grass, yet cattle gains are rarely as impressive as the grass growth. In a dry year, we expect the gains will be very low, and yet at weigh-off, the gains are often better than expected.

A good set of records that provide details of what has happened will allow you to accurately compare one year to the next. A pocket notebook and or a three-ring binder can form the basis for a good system and it can be expanded from that point to a complex computer spreadsheet, if you are so inclined.

Your records should include weather data - amount of rainfall, frost dates, and extreme summer temperatures. Forage or sward information on species mix in the pasture, fertilizer applied, and pasture growth at different times during the grazing season should be recorded. Livestock information including size, type and number of animals on the pasture, frequency of moves to new paddocks, beginning and ending dates of grazing season, amount of residual forage and any supplemental feed required all are essential notes in the record system. A long list, but all factors playing a role.

There are a number of tools to assist in measuring the amount of forage present. Height and density are the two important components and the use of a grazing stick will help in determining the quantity of forage present, and improve estimations of forage amounts in your record keeping system.

Recording and accumulating this information will allow you to make accurate comparisons over other years, and allow you to analyze this year's results, and make grazing decisions that will have a positive benefit to your operation.

Each year is different in the grazing business, but analyzing your own management decisions will help keep the grass growing and the banker happy! Next newsletter: methods of measuring pasture growth!