

Planning For The Coming Grazing Season

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The grazing season has just begun. Now is the time to be planning for the next 5 to 7 months of grazing. Planning is particularly important this year if you are carrying more inventory than usual and have started grazing at the first sign of new grass.

Do you know where and what your livestock will be grazing in August or September? The weather will have some impact on the amount of growth that occurs, but the real opportunity to maximize production and extend the grazing season is to plan ahead. With good planning, and by following the plan, you should have forage available for the entire grazing season.



The first step in planning is to look at what your forage needs are for the entire season. The second step is to do an inventory of available forage. As a rough guideline livestock need a daily dry matter intake of about 3% of body weight. Each inch of growth in a good thick pasture will contain about 150 to 200 lbs. of dry matter per acre.

Do a budget to estimate how much forage you will require for the coming months. For example; a 1250 pound cow will require about 37.5 pounds of dry matter per day ($1250 \times 3\%$). For a month she will require 1125 pounds of dry matter (37.5×30). This is equivalent to 7-8 inches of good quality pasture on an acre of land. As we move into late-July and August, re-growth slows due to heat and lack of moisture. At this time it will take more acres to meet animal needs. At least 50% of pasture growth occurs during May and June. You will need about twice as many acres to feed your livestock during the last 4 months of the year versus the first 2 months. You can make up for this shortfall in growth from a number of different sources. An intensive rotational grazing program will encourage maximum forage growth and will go a long way to helping you meet the late summer needs. If there is a significant amount of forage left in the pasture fields after the May-June grazing, it can be utilized during the later part of the season provided it is of reasonable quality. The 2nd growth in fields that have been harvested for hay can be grazed if this forage is not required for stored forage. Annual crops seeded in late May or June can provide forage for late summer and early fall. Examples of these include sorghum-sudan grass, millets, turnips and cereals. Finally, if none of the above options are available it may be necessary to use stored forage to supplement the pasture during periods of slow growth. By planning now, you will be able to maximize the amount of grazable forage that is available to your livestock and avoid the harvest costs associated with stored forages.