

Grazing Bites

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I'm a little late getting Grazing Bites out this month. Sadly, August was one of those months I was glad to be done with. I was busier than a one eyed cat watching two mouse holes. To say the least, life didn't stop and neither did all the grass, which was a good thing.

Within the last week I've traveled from one end of Indiana to the other and it appears that most areas have received adequate moisture. Forages are still growing, except just a few north-east counties. I would gladly shared some of my August rain with them. August is normally hot and dry enough that most cool season forages often go dormant and plants that like those type of conditions do better, such as panicums and crabgrass. Though those heat-loving forages still grew, the cool season forages never quit either. I've seen some incredible late season hay yields and I'll be the first to admit that I grossly underestimated one of mine. I didn't take a clipping, just did a quick visual to see if it was worth cutting (no, I can't graze it). It was a lot denser than I thought and yielded about three tons per acre. Other fields that I had observed via a windshield also yielded a lot more bales than they appeared. I'm just not used to seeing this much forage this time of year...and I'm certainly not complaining!

What I'm also not used to is a wet August. I really wish I had taken more clippings this summer to measure all the growth on pastures because I believe I probably had record yields. One clipping in late June indicated a little over 7,000 pounds of new growth and it didn't slow down too much after that. With this much moisture and good growing conditions, forages didn't need nearly as much rest and certainly could have probably handled heavier stocking rates.

Unfortunately, high rainfall and extended wet conditions earlier in the year and even with all the extra vegetation, it was hard to not get some plugging and disturbance with heavier livestock numbers. With a little rest, those areas appeared to revegetate quickly. Under more normal conditions, pastures with this type of disturbance (where you can actually see bare ground in some places), would have yielded a host of disturbance-loving weeds mid-summer, such as crabgrass, annual ragweed, and foxtail. They didn't compete very well this year with the relentless forage growth, but persistent hiding perennials liked the opportunity. Perennials such as goldenrod and ironweed did well and reached my mowing threshold requirement in some areas.

I've clipped a lot more pasture this year than normal, but it was needed for a couple reasons. I wanted to make sure I was maximizing the solar panel and keep forages growing as long as possible. The more growth you get this time of year, the longer you will be able to graze. I have fed hay this time of year -

to maximize fall growth. You need to rest as many acres of pasture as you can in the fall, especially if you have tall fescue present. By getting livestock off pastures, you will maximize fall growth and that new growth is going to have the best quality for stockpiling. Forages that don't hold up as well overwinter, such as orchardgrass, should be grazed first, but even then, ideally after they have gone dormant, which is normally after several nights in a row below 26 degrees. I'm getting sidetracked, where was I? Oh, back to the reasons I clipped! Since the weeds are perennials, I certainly don't want them producing more seed. Late mowing seems to put more hurt on them and greatly reduces the chance of them producing more flowers.



Tall Ironweed can be beneficial to pollinators, but not too good as pasture.

I do have some tolerance for a "few" ironweed. Most are tall ironweed, (*Vernonia gigantea*), with the very familiar purple flower head that is usually around from mid-summer to fall. Ironweed is a good source of pollen and nectar and attracts a lot of valuable native pollinators and butterflies.

Monarch butterflies also like ironweed along with several swallowtails. If they were in a garden, they would be called flowers; in pastures, they are still weeds, but weeds with some benefits I guess. Goats and sheep will eat some ironweed, especially when it is young. Once it starts putting on flowers, it gets a rust on the leaves and browsing stops completely.

I'm not as concerned about goldenrod, but it also can get too thick. Sheep, goats and even cattle to an extent, will browse some on the leaves. I've seen lots of plants stripped of every leaf by sheep. Goldenrod, (*Solidago sp.*), also can get a rust, and it can be rather toxic to livestock, but normally it is not a problem unless they over consume it due to lack of other suitable vegetation, such as in a drought.

Another plant that tends to really appreciate the extra moisture and almost ideal growing conditions this year are blackberries. A few blackberries are fine a fencerow here and there, and maybe even a small narrow patch occasionally in the pasture. A few provide some fine snacks while checking cows in the middle of summer and maybe even a pie or jam if enough make it back to the house. If left unchecked, they quickly become a brambly mess, shade out forages, and do little more than provide rabbit cover that even the best rabbit dog would not want to venture into. Mowing in the fall sets them back and if followed with some herbicide on new growth, they are fairly easy to control.

Back to grazing.... With the extra moisture, this should be an incredible stockpiling year. If you want to boost the crude protein content of tall fescue for stockpiling, you can add 30 or 40 units of nitrogen. If you have at least 30% legume in the stand, then the added nitrogen is generally not needed.

If you have corn fields that have been or will be harvested soon, running livestock on those stock fields will allow more rest on the pastures and thus more potential growth and grazing days. Dry soil conditions are ideal for grazing corn stalks, so play it by ear this year.

The nutritional value of corn stalks can certainly vary from year to year. About one acre of typical corn residue will be needed per animal unit per grazing month. Weekly allocations seem to work very well, so you need to figure how many acres of stalks will be needed for one week of grazing for your herd. Stalks will start out in the 8% crude protein range with approximately 70% total digestible nutrients (TDN) and over a period of about 60 days drop to 5% crude protein and 40% TDN. Stalks will meet most of spring calving cows' energy needs during mid gestation.

Growing animals, such as calves and fall calving lactating cows may be lacking a little in energy and protein and most likely will need to be supplemented if fed on only stalks. Energy can be increased on these stalk fields by seeding annuals which need to be seeded as soon as possible.

My favorite fall grazing mix is spring oats, a brassica such as turnips, and cereal rye. The oats and turnips provide some really good high yielding fall forage for grazing that comes on quickly with adequate moisture, and the cereal rye sticks around to keep something green growing and providing some winter cover, spring residue, and possible spring grazing.

I'd better get back to it. Keep on grazing!

Reminders & Opportunities

Southern Indiana Purdue Ag Center (SIPAC) Ag Day – September 10th – at SIPAC. Starts at 2 pm and is over by 8 pm. Meal provided and topics include cattle handling facilities and raising tilapia. RSVP by September 6th by calling 812-482-1782. For more information contact Purdue Extension Dubois County at (812) 482-1782 or Jason Tower at towerj@purdue.edu or (812) 678-4427.

More pasture information and past issues of Grazing Bites are available at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/technical/landuse/pasture/>