

Grazing Bites

November 2017

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I really don't know what happened to the fall. It seems like it should still be September, not November, but the weather is now starting to confirm the date and the realization that winter will soon be upon us.

I often talk about taking inventory of winter feedstuff. I'm primarily measuring dry matter, e.g. hay, pasture, stockpile, crop residue, and grazable annuals still left. October rains certainly helped to green things up and provide some new growth, but that won't last much longer and real growth is about done and dormancy of perennials is not far off. Three or four nights in a row in the 20's is usually enough to stop and/or kill top growth and force dormancy. If the weather stays cold or at least cool, plants will remain dormant until starting to grow again in the spring. Please note; as long as that plant is still growing at all, it's not dormant.

Back to the dry matter; how do the dry matter requirements of the ruminant animals for the winter period match up with what you have on hand? Figure an average weight per class and then multiply that number times the number of each class. Now you have a total live weight. Multiply total live weight by .03 to get an average daily intake. For example 20 cows weighting 1,100 pounds is 22,000 pounds live weight times .03 (three percent dry matter intake) equals 660 pounds of dry matter needed per day.

Compare the amount of dry matter you will need for the livestock with how much you have and absolutely allow for waste. How hay is stored and fed affects how much is actually consumed. Hay stored outside and fed free choice can easily waste up to 45 percent of the offered amount. The more waste, the more you need to have on hand. Once you know about how much dry matter you are going to need to get through the winter and an idea on how much you have available to feed, if you are a little short on forages, you can add some supplements such as corn gluten, soybean hulls, etc. into your feeding plan. In fact, you may want to add supplements anyway if hay quality is somewhat lacking, or if more energy is needed. We used 3 percent for the intake estimate which is actually a little high, but if we have a wet, cold winter, energy needs to keep warm will increase and any growing animals will also have higher needs. It's better to overestimate than to be short. Cold, wet, and especially muddy conditions will increase energy requirements. If you are still short on feed, then you may want to purchase some hay or consider reducing numbers some.

Purchased feeds, whether hay, silage, or supplements, are all direct costs against the animal operation which increases the per-animal cost. Before you commit to any input costs, you probably need to look at alternatives or the other side of the scale. Is it more cost effective to reduce animal numbers or to buy feed where short? Are there animals that are hard keepers that will require more feed to maintain? Are there animals that have not kept up with the remaining animal production model?

Here are a few things to at least look at and consider when evaluating your herd. First would be **body condition**. If an animal is not able to gain efficiently on the pasture or other feeds present, especially as compared to the rest of the group and maintain itself likewise, then this animal is certainly a candidate for culling. I certainly look at **temperament**. Animals with a poor attitude quite often disrupt normal activities and can also sometimes be considered dangerous. Life is too short to deal with some animals. **Health** should be a major factor. This could be a genetic issue or

an ailment that might justify culling. Animals that are just not reproducing or cycling as they should be should be considered to be culled. It is also the opportunity to improve the herd. If you cull or sell off a certain percentage of the group each year, such as five or ten percent, then the remaining are that much better, plus you are amplifying the best animals. Selecting for animals with **good conformation** is important. They should have good feet and legs, udders, good scrotal conformation, and good girth and appropriate frame. They should also hold **appropriate characteristics for the breed**, and male and female features. If the animal doesn't fit your program or management, then consider culling it. Using these evaluation methods, will give you the opportunity to build herds back with good, sound, efficient animals that can provide you and the next generation with even better stock.

One last note on stockpiled forages. Back fencing is generally highly recommended as you graze across a field to keep the animals from continuing to go back and eat new regrowth. I usually base this on the quality of the stockpile. Older stockpile, or stockpile over 90 days old, is less likely to be overgrazed. I would certainly keep an eye on the field and if you see much grazing of regrowth or too much soil disturbance, especially if you are seeing any bare soil at all, back fence. Once forages go completely dormant, grazing will have less impact on next spring's growth, but grazing it too short will still have a negative impact on runoff, infiltration, and the possibility of weeds the next season.

I will end this issue with a few personal thoughts about Thanksgiving. Many families have a tradition of everyone noting something that they are thankful for prior to the bountiful feast they are about to partake. 'Tis the season, so, I'm thankful for fall rains and the forage and crops we have, even after dry weather. I'm thankful for growing up in the era where working hard was respected and expected, when families gathered at the table for meals, and ate from the garden more than a box. When watching a black and white TV was something special for a few quality shows. When homes were rarely locked, you knew all your neighbors, and you waited until the party line was open to make a call. When life at least seemed simpler, slower, and less stressful. I wish everyone a happy Thanksgiving, perhaps bringing back some old traditions, enjoying family, friends, food, and all the blessings that we should be thankful for.

Keep on grazing!

Reminders & Opportunities

Stock Dog Workshop – November 14-16, 2017 – For more information contact Denice Rackley at denice.r@lycos.com

Northern Indiana Grazing Conference (NIGC) – February 2-3, 2018, Michiana Event Center (new location) 4405 E Farver St., Shipshewana, IN. For more information about the NIGC or to get a registration form, please call the LaGrange County Soil & Water Conservation District office at 260-463-3471 extension 3.

Southern Indiana Grazing Conference (SIGC) – March 7, 2018, Crane, IN – Speakers include Dr. Allen Williams, Dr. Pat Keyser, and Dr. Ray Smith. For more information contact the Daviess County Soil and Water Conservation office at 812-254-4780, Ext 3, email Toni Allison dc.swcd@daviess.org, or visit <http://www.daviesscoswcd.org/index.php/sigc> or <https://www.facebook.com/SouthernIndianaGrazingConference>

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