

# Grazing Bites

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It is really starting to look more and more like winter. This is generally the time of year when things ought to slow down a little bit, but that never seems to happen much anymore. Winter is the time of year I like to catch up on reading. My reading time really gets whittled down during the growing season. So far this fall, I've continued to race the sun and not slow down much in risk of "burning daylight." I admit to multitasking occasionally when I really shouldn't be. For example, while cutting kraut on a mandoline, I started thinking about a couple other things that I needed to be doing and removed the tip of a finger. Thank goodness it was the last of the last cabbage and only a small chunk to throw away. My wife had problems just bringing me some gauze to stop the bleeding and almost had to lay down on the floor before she fainted. She is normally better help than that!

Part of the problem this fall has been way too much good weather. Is that really a problem? I'll never complain about a good day to work outside. I find this a good time of year to build or repair fences, trim back tree limbs where needed and get everything lined up for any adverse weather that might show up with little warning. Feeding pads should be cleaned off by now and topped with some new lime if needed. It certainly doesn't hurt to even go ahead and have at least a bale or two sitting out ready to go whether to be fed on a feed pad (Heavy Use Area Protection – rock pad) or positioned where it can be unrolled out in a pasture where nutrients and or organic matter are needed.



*A new layer of lime on a winter feeding area. These pads make good places to feed hay when needed and healthier than mud for the cows.*

I would much rather feed a bale unrolled out in the field where the nutrients from the hay and manure from the grazing livestock can be used to grow more grass and not have to be hauled. If you aim to unroll hay, it is not a bad idea to have it already stored close to that site. You can also just position bales where you want to feed them and not unroll them. If I'm thinking about doing this, I will try and wait until the either the ground is frozen or dry and as late in the season as possible. Those bales are best fed then on end, and preferably in bale rings to reduce waste. Sitting them out early on their end may promote more loss from the hay unless you want to take the time to cover them with plastic or something to shed the rain and snow until used. I've seen old round hog feeder lids used.

Those bales that are positioned out ahead of time will need to be fenced off with some temporary fence. Poly-wire on a reel or reels and step-in posts are ideal for allocating out these bales. When you lay them out, think about where nutrients are needed and then also how you will allocate them out. Somewhat straight lines with adequate spacing between bales is needed. Generally, you want at least 16 feet between bales. Double rows can be set the same way where you want, or need to allocate out two bales at a time. Feeding hay this way is also referred to as "bale grazing."

Hay costs money. I don't care where it came from or how you obtained it. It took time and fuel to move it there and nutrients to grow it...which have to be replaced. Hay feeding needs to be as efficient as possible for the whole time frame that you are needing to feed it. Hopefully, you are working to cut that time frame down more and more. I'd much rather move a temporary fence in some stockpiled forage than get a tractor out on a cold winter day.

It is easier to put out several bales or allocate several at a time, but the efficiency increases the shorter the time frame you are feeding for. When you used to only feed cattle small bales of hay, it was fed daily, sometimes twice a day providing only what they needed at the time. That was super-efficient. The cows pretty well cleaned up most of the hay fed between feedings. When the use of large round bales took hold, mainly to save hand labor, we lost a fair amount of efficiency. This loss came from storing more hay outside, storing it on bare ground, and then more wastage when fed. The less hay put out at a time, the more competition for that bite. Less time to be picky and more

time concentrating on beating that other cow to the next bite. If you set a large buffet in front of them, they will pick out what they want and waste more. If you allocate the feed out in shorter time frames, then it will be like that one fried chicken served for Sunday dinner for a whole family...you're going to get your piece before someone else does or risk doing without.

The fall rains did help grow a little more forage. Not as much as I would have liked, the rain came just a little too late. If you have paid any attention to the drought map, the area was reduced a lot in the last month. I'm pleased and thankful for the growth that I received and grateful that it should last several more weeks yet.



*Fall regrowth coming on after fall rains. This will eventually have some grazing. The rains just didn't come quick enough.*

Getting water out to everywhere you want it can be a little more challenging this time of year. Certainly all-weather type tanks (heated, ball, well insulated, and spring tanks) are pretty simple, but they are often not where you want them. I use hydrants and quick couplers as long as possible, even with some runs of above ground lines. The more the water is used on a cold night, the more likely it will not freeze up. If there is not enough animal pressure on the tank, then it is more likely to start freezing up from not enough use. When temperatures get down to the mid 20's, it's time to stop using hydrants and quick couplers or risk busting something.

You can certainly use a permanent all-weather tank with strip grazing. Just start your strip grazing at the water source and keep moving your temporary fence farther away. You will normally not get too much back grazing. The animals are more interested in that new allocation of forage. If the tank is in the middle of the field, then you work one way and then the other.

I hope everyone is blessed with some stockpiled forage, fall planted annuals and or crop residue to extend that grazing season. Livestock are very content grazing this time of year, probably as much so as about any time of the year. I will also be more content when I can start finding more time to read in the near future and paying more attention to the job at hand.

Keep on grazing!

## Reminders & Opportunities

**National Grazing Conference** – Grapevine, TX, December 13–16, 2015 <http://www.grazinglands.org/grazing-conference/>

**American Forage & Grassland Council Conference** – January 10-13, 2016, Baton Rouge, LA [http://www.afgc.org/annual\\_conference.php](http://www.afgc.org/annual_conference.php)

**Heart of America Grazing Conference** – January 25-26, 2016, Lexington, KY. More information is available at: <https://www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage/2016%20HOA%20Brochure.pdf>

**Northern Indiana Grazing Conference** – February 5-6, 2016, Michiana Event Center, Howe, IN – Speakers include Gary Zimmer, Reggie Destree, David Schlabach, Jim Adkins and James Landis [http://www.lagrangeswcd.org/mgxroot/page\\_10791.html](http://www.lagrangeswcd.org/mgxroot/page_10791.html)

**Southern Indiana Grazing Conference** – March 2, 2016, Crane, IN – Speakers include Allan Nation (Stockman Grass Farmer Magazine), Wesley Tucker, and Doug Peterson. 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](mailto:dc.swcd@daviess.org), or visit <http://www.daviesscoswcd.org/index.php/sigc> or <https://www.facebook.com/SouthernIndianaGrazingConference>



*Allan Nation, editor of The Stockman Grass Farmer Magazine, will be one of the speakers at the SIGC!*

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/>