

GRAZING NEWSLETTER



Grazing

Spring 2012

Mike's Paddock



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I love spring. If you're a pasture-based livestock farmer you would be a little crazy not to love spring. It's easy for me to think back to the good old

days as a sharemilker in New Zealand. My herd numbered 250, but I knew every cow by name, who her mother was, who her daddy was and whether she chewed her cud on the right or left side of her jaw. My wife used to joke to her friends that I really had 251 wives — at least during the calving season. For those seven weeks, I stole time to eat and sleep when I could.

Sooner than later though, calving was over and my 'wives' and I settled down to a mutually-acceptable routine. Seeing milk run out of tight udders as they waited in the yard to be milked made me realize that all the attention to detail that I had done in the fall and winter had paid off. I had maintained appropriate fall rotation length and post-grazing residuals to ensure high-quality spring regrowth, and I had dried the cows off in calving condition to minimize wintertime feeding to meet maintenance requirements. Now, I was ready to reap what I had sown.

Spring generally means steadily increasing temperatures and daylight hours. The good part about these two things is that while they are essential for forage growth, they also are free. The farmer's job is to make sure that the forages are ready in every way to capitalize on long, warm days ahead. That means adequate nutrient reserves (appropriate fertilizer use) and plants that are green from top to bottom.

Spring is the time when pasture plants transition from winter slowdown or hibernation to the rampant spring growth flush. Grazing rotation length and post-grazing residual is critical at this time. Graze too fast and you end up in the spring 'tailspin'. Graze too slow and you end up with a wall of feed that should be wrapped or bagged.

How can you avoid these costly mistakes? It is absolutely important to quantify how much grass you are producing. You have to know your forage growth rates and availability to accurately adjust concentrate feeding levels. And, if you know that growth rates are exceeding demand, the surplus can be harvested for later use as supplemental forage while quality is maintained over the rest of the farm. To accurately measure forage growth, I recommend using a rising plate meter and grazing wedge software. An online grazing wedge calculator from the University of Missouri Extension can be found at www.dfagrazing.com under Resources.

In addition, spring is the one time of year that tillering takes place in mostly cool season annuals and perennials. Adhering to proper grazing residuals maximizes this effect. Once summer arrives, it's too late. Grass is then in the reproductive phase, and with the exception of tall fescue, any type of harvest (mechanical or grazing) will not stop seed production and result in decreasing palatability and nutritional content.

Springtime is the season of plenty if you're a grazer and usually the most economic.

Cheers,

Mike

Dairy Grazing Services becomes DFA Grazing

Dairy Farmers of America, Inc. (DFA) offers Farm Services because we are committed to delivering more value to our members.

To strengthen the partnership with our Cooperative and the other Farm Services offered, Dairy Grazing Services has rebranded to become DFA Grazing.

In addition to DFA Grazing, DFA's other Farm Services business units — DFA Risk Management, DFA Insurance, DFA Farm Supplies, DFA Energy and DFA Financing — have been renamed to better align with the Cooperative's name.

DFA Grazing will continue to serve all clients regardless of cooperative affiliation with the same commitment to providing valuable consultation and tools to improve producers' dairy grazing management.

To learn more about DFA Grazing and how pasture-based dairying can work on your operation, contact Andrew Fidler at 816-801-6660 or visit www.dfagrazing.com.