

Mike's Paddock



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This spring was really one to remember, not only because in most places it was a tad late arriving, but because it was one of fantastic

growth rates, especially in cool-season perennials.

Now we're in the middle of summer, and perennial plant physiology has changed. So does the way we manage it.

Managing summer forages

Perennial plants and forage species are now in full reproductive phase. Plant dry-matter content is increasing. Protein levels are decreasing and seed heads are appearing. However, all is not lost. If the grazer applied proper spring management techniques to his pastures, he still has a high-quality forage base to offer his cows.

The grazing rotation needs to be adjusted out to allow a longer plant recovery process during this time of year. Although adequate irrigation has a dramatic effect on the natural decrease in summer pasture dry matter, it can't slow down seed-head production. Whether irrigation is available or not, it is still important to regularly measure pastures to match rotation length with growth rates.



Pregrazing clipping of summer pastures can sometimes increase dry-matter intake (DMI), but won't stop most perennials from producing another seed head. Summer is also the time when we can tolerate higher grazing residuals. My own experience has shown that postgrazing residuals of 200–300 pounds of dry matter per acre over spring levels encourages a quicker fall bounce back in forage production. Tall fescue is the exception to the rule. While tall fescue produces only one seed head, growth rates wane during summer, and it is critical that the rotation be adjusted accordingly. This is especially the case with the newer soft-leaf novel or friendly endophyte varieties.

Kentucky (KY) 31 tall fescue also is at its most toxic levels, and if it's a major contributor to the forage offering, it needs to be blended with summer annual forages to lessen the effect of lowered milk production and animal performance. The saving grace of KY 31 is that it is superb winter feed when stockpiled. We'll talk about that in the next newsletter. As a general rule, there is not a financial benefit to fertilizing summer perennial pasture. It's best to put your fertilizer dollars into accelerated fall production.

With millet and sorghum/sudan varieties, pay close attention to postgrazing residuals. For timely regrowing, these crops need a 5–6 inch



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grazing residual. The grazing rotation length should be around 30 days. Crabgrass, on the other hand, needs a shorter grazing interval to remain palatable. Crabgrass growth can be very prolific, especially under irrigation of timely summer rainfall. It responds very well to nitrogen application, so 50 units immediately after germination can jump-start this crop very quickly. Postgrazing residuals need to be kept low at 1,300–1,400 pounds of dry matter per acre.

Besides pasture quality and quantity, there are other factors that can reduce grazed DMI during the warm summer months. Two of the major culprits are excessive heat and horn flies. The good news is that both can be managed.

Battling the heat

Excessive heat causes increased respiration rate in cows, and this means they spend less time grazing and more time burning energy through heaving. At the very least, an area of shade and a close source of clean drinking water need to be available. Cooling ponds are good, too, but they need to be large enough to accommodate the group size and, most important, be replenishable. Misting

cows under center pivots is best if they are available.

Controlling pests

Excessive numbers of horn flies can also drive down grazed DMI as cows adopt the “wagon wheel” scenario in the corner of the field. There are many chemical aids to prevent or at least control horn fly duress. Pour-on control is convenient, but can be expensive. Daily spraying with a permethrin or pyrethroid-based water mix is good, but labor intensive. Fogging cows with mineral oil works very well, too, but a system needs to be in place to restrain cows long enough for the process and the pump needs to be powerful enough to almost atomize the oil. Do not soak cows with any kind of oil. This will cause an oil-based barrier on the cow's skin and prevent heat dissipation.

Although fogging methods can help control mature flies, consider using an approved insect growth regulator (IGR) to inhibit fly growth at the earliest stages. IGRs, used as part of the mineral pack, kill fly larva as they hatch from eggs in the manure. Obviously, control won't happen overnight, but if IGR use is part of the overall nutrition program, the fly burden will lessen over time.

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