

## Mike's Paddock



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As I ventured north this spring into the land of perennial ryegrass and clover, it became very apparent that, almost without

exception, graziers were too late getting their milking cows out of the barn or sacrifice paddock and onto pasture. This was evident because of the excessive post-grazing residual left behind from the previous day's grazing and a surging "wall" of over-ripe pasture in front of the herd. When I asked the reason why the pastures looked like they did, there were basically two answers:

- "We were worried that we might get a cold snap, run out of grass and we'd have to bring the cows off."
- "It was still a little wet and we didn't want to wreck our stand."

These are valid answers, but with perennial ryegrass, there are ways to manage both situations.

First of all, when the northern weather warms up enough to encourage the start of grass growth, one thing is certain: The grazing wedge you had during the previous season has disappeared and the grazier is now faced with a block of grass — all the same height — growing at the same rate. The prudent grazier should start measuring his ryegrass when it is around 3 inches tall or 2,000 pounds

## Summer season grazing tips

From reduced dry matter intake (DMI) to fly control issues, the summer months present a new set of challenges for graziers. Below are some tips to consider as you work through this season:

- Heat and humidity play a big role in the reduction of grazed DMI in the summer. In the south, it will be difficult to manage a 50 percent DMI on pasture to maintain adequate milk production. Consider cooling cows under misting pivots, cooling ponds, portable shade or, at the very least, give them access to a shady stand of trees. Adequate clean water that's easily accessible is absolutely essential.
- Have an effective horn fly control program in place. Cows that are constantly covered in horn flies use a lot of energy swinging their tails at the flies — energy that could be going into milk production.
- If you are considering grazing warm season annuals such as sorghum-sudan, sudangrass or millet, take some forage samples from different areas of the field and get a nutrient analysis done. This will help your nutritionist develop a more accurate pTMR or parlor ration. Be careful not to graze these crops before they are ready, as immature sudans produce prussic acid and millet can have high nitrate levels.

Remember to continue to manage your pasture throughout the summer months by measuring often and taking care to release cows into a paddock and pull them off at the optimum levels. Extra pasture can be cut and stored for winter.

of dry matter per acre. Taking weekly walks and measuring the same areas will give the grazier a growth rate. Calculating growth rate per day against the area of the grazing platform gives an idea as to when we should introduce grazing. It could be only a portion of the herd (high cows) or grazing only once a day. But to form a functioning wedge from a block, the grazier must start grazing when the

ryegrass is slightly immature. If the ideal pre-grazing level needs to be 3,000 pounds of dry matter per acre, the grazier needs to start grazing at 2,400. When spring growth conditions become perfect, perennial ryegrass displays explosive growth. If allowed, the pasture can get ahead of the cows to the point that the grazier is forced to either prematurely close pastures for silage or suffer inadequate post-



## Mike's Paddock, cont.

grazing residuals that will affect subsequent growth recovery and the nutritive value of following grazings.

Spring is fraught with wet spells due to rainfall. If the pasture needs to be grazed, on/off grazing is the solution. This is simply putting the cows on an allotted area of pasture and letting them graze to the point of fullness. Once this occurs, pull the herd off until the next grazing period. On/off grazing prevents excessive pugging or treading, and keeps a high-value feed going into the rumen. There are beneficial bacteria in the rumen mat that aid in digestion and fiber breakdown. If these bacteria are not getting the same feed day after day, they become confused, and digestive issues arise along with production fluctuations.

Perennial ryegrass is one of the few cool season perennials that tillers. Basically this means that the plant is capable of lateral forage production by producing new leaves. This, however, has to be managed.

Tips for good ryegrass management:

- Graze between the second and third leaf stage
- Maintain a constant cover of green leaf area all year
- Leave a post grazing residual of 1,500–1,600 pounds of dry matter per acre

## Understanding proper ryegrass grazing

Perennial ryegrass tillers normally maintain three live leaves.

After being grazed, the three leaves are removed. When the first leaf emerges again during regrowth, it is produced using sugars stored in the plant. When the second leaf emerges, the plant will start restoring some of its sugar reserves. The sugar reserves in the plant are only fully restored once the third leaf is almost completely emerged. Grazing before the second leaf has emerged will limit regrowth and threaten plant survival. Grazing after the third leaf has fully emerged will waste pasture and reduce nutritional value. Please note that the drop in nutrition after the third leaf stage occurs faster in the warm seasons than in fall.

Timing of grazing also affects root growth. Immediately after a ryegrass tiller is grazed, the growth of the root stops so the plant can use its sugar reserves to grow new leaves. Once the first leaf emerges, the root growth will recommence. Plants that are grazed on too short a rotation will develop less root mass. Plants with less root mass are more easily pulled out by cows and are vulnerable to hot and dry conditions.

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