

Graze or Chop Corn When Pastures Dry up

Are your pastures drying up? How about your dryland corn or pivot corners? Today's discussion will be about combining these problems to make the best of a bad situation.

When pastures become short due to dry weather, you can bet many dryland corn fields also are too dry to produce much grain. To salvage your corn crop, provide feed for your livestock, and reduce damage to your pasture, try green chopping or even grazing your corn.

Watch out for high nitrates if you green chop. Cut high to leave lower stalks in the field and never allow green chop to heat in the wagon or the feed bunk. That makes the nitrates even more toxic. So just chop what your animals will eat in one meal.

Grazing probably is the cheapest and safest way to use this corn. It may sound crazy to graze corn, but with little or no grain, corn is similar to other summer annual grasses like sudangrass and millet. In fact, corn leaves and stalks often contain more TDN and protein than these more commonly used grasses.

If you do decide to graze your corn, don't just turn animals in and let them graze. Use an electric fence to strip graze the field. Otherwise, cattle trample so much that it's hardly worth grazing. Generally, a highly visible electric wire or two that you move every couple days works well for stock cows. Stockers or dairy cows do even better if you move the fence daily. Be sure to first train cattle to your fence, though, or they might run right through it.

Dry weather might ruin your original plans for your corn. But don't lose everything. Chopping and grazing can be surprisingly good ways to salvage what is left if you need the feed. So use it rather than lose it.

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