

GROW ALL YOU CAN BEFORE WINTER

Hay is for winter and pasture is for summer – right? Well, maybe we should rethink this schedule to increase overall production.

Many of us welcomed some late August rain and pastures are growing well. That means we can continue grazing and can hold our hay until later. Or does it?

Let's think about this for a moment. Does pasture grow during winter? Of course not, so if we want more forage we need to encourage it during the growing season. What will happen, though, if we graze pastures short now during late summer and fall? Of course – growth slows down so our pasture produces less total forage than if we let it grow without grazing.

In order to let it grow and accumulate without grazing, we probably need to feed hay instead. But if we feed hay now, won't we have less of it available for winter? Probably – but we shouldn't need as much hay for winter because all that extra pasture growth that accumulates now while we feed hay can be grazed this fall and winter when we normally feed hay.

In fact, if we allow pastures to grow as much as possible from now until it freezes, we may feed less total hay before next spring than if we follow our standard practice of grazing now and saving hay for winter.

Think about it. If you expect to feed hay eventually before next spring, it might be smarter to feed some of that hay now rather than later so your pastures can produce extra forage while they still can.

Sometimes doing things backwards from our normal practices can maximize production. Feeding hay now and grazing this winter might be one of them.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
314 Keim Hall—East Campus
Lincoln NE 68583-0915
402-4742-2577
banderson1@unl.edu

