

GRAZING WET PASTURES

As your spring grazing season begins, pastures often are soft and wet. Grazing can quickly get these pastures muddy and damaged by hoof traffic.

Use special grazing techniques to limit damage in soft, muddy pastures. The worst thing you can do is graze a pasture for several days until it's all torn up and then move to a new area. Trampling that occurs repeatedly over several days greatly weakens plants; doing this across a wide area can reduce production for months, even years.

In contrast, pastures muddied up by grazing only briefly usually recover quickly. Maybe not as fast as when the ground is solid, but fast enough to minimize yield or stand loss.

Take advantage of this rapid recovery by moving animals frequently, at least once a day, to a new area. If this involves walking animals long distances, it might be better to subdivide pastures with temporary electric fences so you don't increase trampling during the moving process. This also can increase the number of new areas to move into. Fencing supplies you use around corn stalks during winter should work well for this temporary use. Once the ground firms up you can return to your normal grazing rotation.

Another option is to graze all your cattle together in one small area until the ground gets solid again, feeding hay if needed. This protects most of your pasture acres from trampling losses. But it can virtually destroy the area grazed and need reseeding. This may be a small price to pay, though, to protect the rest of your acres.

Don't let mud and trampling ruin your pastures. Temporary grazing adjustments can save grass now and for the future.

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