

August 2016

PLANNING NEXT YEAR'S GRAZING TODAY

Do you have extra grass this year? If so, there are ways you can improve next year's grazing by managing this year's grass.

Extra grass is not normal. If you are lucky enough to have more grass than needed this year, don't forget that next year could be hotter and drier than this year – producing less grass.

But you can boost carrying capacity and gains on next year's pasture by strategically managing your extra grass this year.

Start by identifying pasture improvements that could help future grazing. Control weeds, accumulate enough growth on warm-season grass pastures to conduct an effective prescribed burn next spring, or select pastures where stressing the existing stand will help you establish legumes next spring. All these practices can temporarily reduce pasture growth, but they can provide long-term benefits. Thus, it is better to do them when you have extra grass rather than when grass is short.

Another way to help next year's growth is to avoid overgrazing this fall unless you are doing it intentionally to prepare for interseeding next spring. Heavy fall grazing weakens plants as they go into winter and causes them to grow less vigorously after spring green-up. If you do graze heavy this fall, though, do it on pastures that will be used last next spring. This will give them extra time to recover.

A particularly valuable way to manage extra grass is to begin to stockpile some growth now for either grazing this winter or to start grazing extra early next spring. This could save on winter hay needs or give you an area to get animals away from mud next spring. Plus, it's usually good for your grass, too.

Take advantage of extra grass to begin long-term pasture improvements. It happens so rarely that next year might be too late.

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