

Windrow Grazing to Extend Grazing, Preserve Quality

How do you handle pastures that grow too fast? That's what brome as well as crop fields planted to oats or cereal rye for grazing have done lately. There are several options.

The most obvious way to conserve extra growth is by cutting hay from parts of the pasture. Normally I try to avoid extra hay cutting but if you have the equipment and more pasture than you can use this spring, and some time, cutting hay for use later in summer or winter is a good option. It might be especially wise for crop fields where you can plant another crop after removing the hay.

If you instead decide to graze, obviously you can graze them as normal, but that will waste a lot of feed. There are ways, though, that might reduce waste and keep forage quality a little higher.

One option is to move animals through multiple pastures very quickly. Fast moves can accomplish two things. First, animals move more frequently into fresh pasture so they have more opportunities to select the best quality forage to graze. And second, more leaves are left behind to encourage more rapid regrowth. Extra cross fencing might be needed, though, to assure sufficient recovery periods.

This fast move option probably is not very suitable for oat or rye pastures that are unlikely to regrow much no matter how you graze. Here, windrow grazing might be a better option. To try it, first cut and windrow a couple week's worth of pasture. Then build an electric cross fence that gives them just a couple days worth. When they finish that piece, move the fence to give them some more windrows. As they near the end of the windrows you already cut, lay down another patch and repeat this strip grazing of windrows as long as you wish or can.

Windrow grazing sometimes doubles the number of grazing days compared to regular grazing. Maybe it can work for you, too.

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

