

WINTER GRAZING OPPORTUNITIES

As our growing season winds down, it's time to plan and assess your winter grazing options. Some options may be pretty good this year.

Hay and silage are expensive winter feeds. If you can find something for your animals to graze rather than be fed hay and silage, you will probably save over a dollar per day per cow.

Extra rain in many areas this summer and fall produced more than the usual amount of growth on rangeland, plus good regrowth on alfalfa and grass hay fields. A few fields of summer annual grasses have good new regrowth and many early planted cover crops have grown nicely. There's even a lot of volunteer winter wheat growing in many areas.

These all can be grazed this fall and winter. Yes – you may need to take some slight precautions to do it safely. Alfalfa has a slight risk of bloat. Green wheat and grass regrowth might have a tendency to cause some grass tetany or respiratory problems if animals are moved to these lush pastures from dry, brown pastures without any adaptation. Be careful following a hard freeze, or maybe wait until a few days after a killing freeze happens before putting animals on these lush pastures. And many fields may need some temporary fence or have water hauled to them.

But don't let these challenges prevent you from using these resources. Not only will you get some good quality, less expensive feed for your animals, grazing also could be good for the land. Most of the nutrients in the plants will be recycled back to the soil via manure and urine, making them available to support next year's crop.

Look around. Wherever you have grazable growth remaining, take advantage of it. It's like money in the bank, and good feed, too.

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