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HIGH PRESSURE GRAZING

A big pasture management challenge is keeping grass from heading out, becoming less palatable and low quality. This spring that wasn't easy to do. So now you might change how you graze the rest of the year.

Normally cows might graze a paddock for two to ten days, then move to a fresh paddock. If you do that now with all the headed out grass, they'd just strip some leaves, trample a lot of forage, and leave most of the stems standing. They'd probably end up eating less than one-fourth of the potential forage available.

So maybe you should pressure them into eating more of the plants by limiting how much choice they have. Instead of giving them the entire paddock to graze for several days, use electric fence to limit them to very tiny areas at a time.

How tiny you ask? Well, one possible initial goal would be to put the equivalent of about 250,000 pounds of cattle on just one acre. That equals about 150 to 200 cow-calf pairs per acre. Obviously, it won't take them long to finish off that small area, so expect to give them a fresh strip about three times a day. With that high density of animals, they might eat over half of the forage compared to the one-fourth they would eat otherwise.

Getting water to the animals can be a challenge so I suggest letting them walk back to water over previously grazed strips for a couple days before changing water locations. It will take a little adjustment to get just the right size and water placement but after a couple days it should go smoothly.

If all goes well, you'll get more cow-days of grazing with less waste.

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



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