

DON'T OVERGRAZE WARM-SEASON GRASSES

Remember the old grazing adage “take half and leave half”? In a moment we’ll learn how it applies to your pastures this fall.

“Take half and leave half” was the grazing management recommended for many years on rangeland and for planted warm-season grasses. And in many cases it still is. But today, more emphasis is on grazing techniques that use cross-fences to form multiple paddocks. These techniques are known by many names like management intensive grazing, controlled grazing, even mob grazing. Used correctly, they permit increased stocking rates and produce excellent animal performance.

How we graze our pastures, though, does not affect the basic growth processes of our grasses. If we severely graze a pasture short, plants in that pasture need extra time to recover before they are grazed again. And warm-season grasses are particularly sensitive to recovery periods that are too short. This is true regardless of whether the plants are in a continuously grazed pasture or the plants are separated into many rotationally grazed paddocks.

Recovery time is particularly important as we approach winter. Extra rain on many pastures this summer allowed grass to thrive. You still may have enough growth to provide grazing for another month or two. But plants grazed earlier this summer may not have fully recovered yet despite the rain. Severe grazing now, before full recovery from earlier grazing, will weaken plants as they go into winter. Plants probably will survive, but next spring they will green-up later, early growth will be slow, and they’ll compete poorly with weeds.

As we approach winter, “take half and leave half” still may be a good management technique. It helps assure that your pastures will be healthy and grow vigorously again next year.

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