

Going Backwards to Move Forward

Many of us have something this year that we don't get very often - good summer soil moisture. This is a suggestion on an unusual way to make use of the unusual resource.

Does your pasture grow during winter? Of course not, it's too cold. The only time your pastures can produce more feed for your livestock is now during the growing season. Does your pasture grow very fast during summer when it is grazed short? Again, the answer is no. Pasture grows fastest when there are plenty of leaves available to capture sunlight.

You're probably wondering by now what I'm getting at. Well, the first point I'm trying to make is that the only time your pastures are at work growing feed for your livestock is during the growing season when they have plenty of leaf area.

Now comes the trick question. Would you feed hay during summer if your pastures still had a little grass remaining? Before answering, let's think about it. Why do you ever feed hay? Isn't part of the reason because you don't have anything to graze? So, to reduce the total amount of hay you feed is to grow as much pasture as possible. And that can be done only now during the growing season, but only if your pastures have lots of leaves to capture sunlight. If you graze off all the leaves, pasture growth is very slow so eventually you will need to feed hay later that much sooner.

To keep pastures growing as fast as possible, maybe you should feed hay during the summer for a week or so if that helps you avoid reducing pasture growth from short grazing. You may think I'm crazy to suggest feeding hay while a little pasture still remains. If it saves you from feeding more hay later on, maybe I'm not so crazy after all.

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