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## GRAZE TO KEEP GRASS HEALTHY

Many pasture weeds can provide satisfactory protein and energy for cattle when eaten, but cattle avoid them due to poor palatability. That's why they're weeds! If pressed hard enough, though, cattle will eat many of them when there is nothing else to eat. While this gets rid of the weeds temporarily, it might not be healthy for the pasture.

Every pasture has millions of weed seeds in the soil and the potential to become weedy. Since some pastures stay relatively clean while other pastures become weedy, other factors undoubtedly influence the weed population. Simply grazing or controlling weeds by spraying or cutting does little to prevent weeds from coming back again unless these other factors are changed to better support desirable plants.

To control weeds, it is much more important to manage grazing to support healthy desirable plants than to weaken or remove unwanted weeds. Grazing that allows sufficient leaf area to remain following grazing that supports rapid regrowth, allows good winterizing, and holds snow and rain moisture on the land rather than running off will benefit the desirable grasses and legumes. Giving pasture plants adequate time to recover after grazing before grazing again is another way to improve or maintain pasture health and strengthen the competitive ability of desirable plants.

Weeds in a pasture can indicate that the pasture itself and the desired plants in it are not in a healthy condition. For improvement to occur, controlling weeds is not enough. Changing management to strengthen desired grasses and legumes also is essential.

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