

June 2017

GRAZING SWITCHGRASS EFFECTIVELY

Grazing switchgrass is a challenge. It becomes stemmy, mature, and less palatable to cattle if not grazed before tall stems develop sometime in June. This year, that will start to happen very soon.

Switchgrass must be grazed before stems develop. Then it is palatable and nutritious but after seedheads emerge, cattle are reluctant to eat it.

Even if you have other pasture available, it is better to graze switchgrass when it's ready and then go back to graze the other pasture later than to let switchgrass get stemmy while grazing other pastures. If this does happen, however, cut the switchgrass for hay and then graze its regrowth seven to eight weeks later.

There are two good methods to graze switchgrass. One involves starting when switchgrass is about ten inches tall and using the right number of animals to keep the grass between eight and sixteen inches. Predicting growth rate of switchgrass in order to stock it correctly is difficult, so I prefer a second method. When switchgrass gets about a foot to eighteen inches tall, stock it heavily enough to graze it down to about six inches in two or three weeks. In good growing conditions, this could take several cows per acre. Then move to a different pasture. Come back to the switchgrass if it regrows to at least a foot tall, which probably will take six or more weeks. Be sure to leave six to eight inches of growth going into winter to keep the stand healthy.

Switchgrass is a problem grass for graziers if not grazed correctly. Use the methods I just described, though, and I think you will find it works pretty good.

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