

March 2017

GRAZING WINTER SMALL GRAINS

Did you plan ahead and plant rye or triticale or even wheat last fall to use as early pasture this spring? If so, you soon will be rewarded. Before long these fields will be ready to graze.

These small grain pastures will be an extremely useful resource this spring. They will relieve you from feeding hay, get your animals out onto clean green grass, and produce excellent gains. They'll also help you wait longer before turning onto your other pastures, giving them a chance to have good growth before grazing.

To maximize grazing from small grain pastures, wait until grass is 4 to 8 inches tall before starting to graze. Then stock heavily enough to maintain plant height between 6 and 12 inches. To accomplish this, either adjust the number of animals according to grass growth or sub-divide the pasture into smaller paddocks and graze rotationally. Grass stands, soils, fertility, and moisture all will affect stocking rate, so adjust stock numbers for your conditions. With careful management and proper stocking, you could graze all the way to mid-June.

One concern when grazing small grain pasture is animal death from grass tetany. Tetany is more common in lactating cows than in dry cows or young stock. Reduce tetany risk by starting to feed magnesium oxide supplements mixed with salt, molasses, or grain at least a couple weeks before starting to graze. Monitor consumption carefully and adjust the mixture so cattle consume about one-quarter pound of magnesium oxide per cow each week.

Small grain pastures can be convenient and profitable. Just use good management to optimize production and prevent livestock losses.

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