

MANAGING SPRING GRAZING

Grazing cool-season grasses in spring should be easy. You have lots of grass and the animals do well. The problem is, sometimes we have so much grass that by early summer much of the pasture has gone to seed. This can lower feed value and reduces calf gains. To avoid this problem, follow these steps.

First, start grazing early, especially if you have many smaller paddocks. Don't wait until pastures are six to eight inches tall; otherwise your grass will get away from you. Instead, begin grazing soon after full greenup. But keep hay available during this early spring grazing. Less scouring and rumen problems will occur as cows adjust to the new, green feed. Once they are accustomed to the pasture your cows will eat very little hay.

Next, rotationally graze through pastures very rapidly, never staying longer than two or three days in one place. Some folks suggest that you should graze every paddock twice within the first forty to forty-five days. Too much rest during fast, early grass growth just lets plants get stemmy, which we often want to avoid. Instead, let animals top off the pasture as best they can to keep as many plants from forming seedstalks as possible. If it's too difficult to rotate animals rapidly through all your paddocks, put some animals in each paddock if possible or open the gates. And if you are certain you will have excess growth anyhow, fence off some pasture and cut it for hay before returning it to grazing.

Finally, as grasses start to elongate, begin slowing rotational grazing to ration out remaining grass and to guarantee that plants get enough rest for regrowth. Good luck, you can do it.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
314 Keim Hall—East Campus
Lincoln NE 68583-0915
402-4742-2577
banderson1@unl.edu

