

Stretching Summer Pasture with Windrow Grazing

An early spring plus good rains have stimulated cool-season grasses to grow faster than cows can eat. In a moment I'll describe a novel way to use some of your extra grass. My own pastures have become overgrown due to all this rain and not enough cows.

You could cut some of the excess for hay. But that takes a lot of work and expense. Instead, how about trying to see how far you can stretch your pasture supply this year by using a grazing technique sometimes used for winter called swath grazing.

Swath grazing, which also is called windrow grazing, is a hybrid between grazing and making hay. To use it during summer, cut and windrow as much of your overgrown pasture as you think is needed to feed the cows for about one week. Then use an electric cross-fence to give them just a day or two supply at a time. When they've nearly finished all the swaths, cut another week's worth until it's all gone.

I tried this briefly two years ago and it worked great. By giving cows just a small area at a time they cleaned it up almost completely! Swath grazing could double the number of animal days of grazing per acre by eliminating much of the trampling waste that would occur if cows are just turned into an overgrown pasture. Intensive strip grazing or mob grazing probably can do the same thing but would require moving fence several times a day.

An added bonus is all the extra time your other pastures will have to regrow. This will provide even more grazing later on. Give it a try. You might decide to do it every year.

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