

GRAZING DURING AN EXTRA EARLY SPRING

Spring pastures are growing fast and early. Since spring management affects your production all year, stay tuned as I share some early grazing thoughts.

Spring pastures ready to graze several weeks earlier than usual is nice, but it also raises some questions about management and risks. For example, if you wait to turn animals out to pasture until close to your normal beginning date, chances are the grass will get so far ahead of your animals that it quickly will become stemmy and low quality. However, if you start grazing today as you normally would when you begin, any cool temperatures might slow grass growth so much that your pastures will run short way before summer even begins. So what should you do?

First, go ahead and start grazing early, but use fewer animals than usual. Try to match your stocking rate with the growth rate of the grass. It may be better to under stock early than over stock; you can add more animals later as growth begins to accumulate.

Since this early grass has quite high forage quality, use animals that can make use of better quality feed. And give them access to some hay to reduce scours and help them adjust to this new, green feed.

Also, rotationally graze through pastures very rapidly. Just top off the pasture, allowing lots of leaves to remain ungrazed. This will keep your pasture growing as fast as possible. If it's too difficult to rotate animals rapidly through all your paddocks, put some animals in each paddock if you can or open the gates.

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.

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