

**April 10, 2015**

## **INCREASE PASTURE CARRYING CAPACITY**

After cattle come in from stalks in the winter many producers will put away electric fence for the summer. That is opposite of where we should be. You should consider using that fence to stretch your pasture grazing and increase grass “spring back” or resiliency.

Electric fence is the easiest and cheapest way to increase production from summer pastures. Dividing pastures with electric cross fences gives you more control of when and where your cattle graze. It helps you encourage cattle to graze pastures more uniformly and completely, including areas they normally avoid. And, it can help you improve the health and vigor of your grass by giving it time to recover and regrow after each grazing. As a result, your grass production and pasture carrying capacity will increase. This will be especially valuable this year considering the currently high cost of pasture.

By mid-summer in July, we usually start to notice our pastures suffering from lack of rain. But rotationally grazed pastures aren't hurt quite as bad. The reason is mainly because grass root systems are healthier and deeper than continuously grazed pastures due to the periodic rest they receive. As a result, they can gather more soil moisture from deeper soil depths.

Cross fences do not need to be permanent, nor do they need to be expensive. This is especially true if you already have electric fencing your animals respect. You might need to use two strands, to help keep baby calves in place. Using fencing equipment you already have gives you an inexpensive opportunity to experiment with where you might eventually place a more permanent cross fence or high tensile electric fence.

About 70% of Nebraska is now listed on the drought monitor (<http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>) at the first two stages of drought. We were blessed with the spring rain so far in our area, but that has not been the case west of us.

Starting rotational grazing when you have plenty of grass will rest plants and begin to improve their root system immediately. This makes them better able to gather moisture during the next dry spell. By concentrating animals onto smaller pastures, grazing uniformity improves. This means your animals do less pick-and-choosing-and-trampling as they graze. They eat more of what is available to them and they waste less feed. This helps current pasture growth feed your animals longer. More grass, better gains, and better profits should be the result.

### **GRASS TETANY**

As cool season pasture grasses grow, grass tetany becomes a concern for cattle. Grass tetany is caused by low blood magnesium which can be due to low levels of magnesium in short, lush spring grass, (less than 4-6 inches tall) but it also is caused by mineral imbalances like high potassium and nitrogen or low calcium in the diet.

Adding about 10 to 20 grams per day of supplemental magnesium via commercial or home-made salt-mineral mixes is a good way to reduce tetany problems. Magnesium oxide is one of the best and cheapest sources of magnesium. Mix equal parts of magnesium oxide with dical, salt, and ground corn for a simple home-made supplement that provides adequate magnesium when cows eat about one pound of the mix per week.



Cattle should receive at least .5 to 2 ounces of supplemental magnesium per head per day to prevent grass tetany. Magnesium is not effectively stored in the body, therefore, supplementing more than two weeks before grazing does not improve the effectiveness.

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