



Grazing Stockpiled Forages.... in January?!?!

Volume 7
Issue 84
January 2012

We hope this first issue for 2012 finds you all happy and healthy (or stuffed) and that Christmas and New Year's was spent with family and friends and everyone enjoyed themselves. Here at the PCBFA, we are ready for another year and excited what that will bring.....new projects, new information and new babies! Be sure to get a jump on things, by attending our AGM on Friday February 10th at the Dunvegan Motor Inn in Fairview, where the evening is sure to entertain!

Stockpiling

If I were to have had a conversation with you over the summer about the benefits and how to's of grazing your stockpiled forages in January, you would have thought I was crazy! But mother nature has had her own idea of what the winter of 2011-2012 should be, and believe me, at this point, I am not complaining! Your cows likely aren't either! Not only does the lack of snow make everyday tasks a bit easier, it is also helping to extend the grazing season and decrease winter feeding costs. When managed properly, stockpiled forages can meet the nutritional requirements of dry cows, in early to mid gestation, during late fall and early winter, through to calving and lactation time in the spring.



Systems

Forages can be stockpiled for a full growing season, for a single grazing season, or the regrowth can be stockpiled following an early hay/silage cut or grazing period. The single graze system is most suited for the drier prairie areas, where there is not an abundance of moisture in the summer to stimulate good regrowth. As some of the native species mature, they can tend to retain their quality better than tame grasses. In more northern areas, a multi-pass system, where the second cut or regrowth from pastures is grazed in the late fall or winter, tends to be a more economical use of the land and forage. In the Peace Country in order to ensure that there is enough forage available for stockpiled grazing, the rule of thumb is to either graze or cut for hay before the end of June. This will allow for adequate forage regrowth during the remaining growing season and will result in a balance of high quantity and high quality forage that will be available from October until the snow makes feeding inaccessible.

Forage Selection

The type of forage species to use for stockpiling depends on the type of system being used. Ideally in a cut/graze or a multi pass system, a species that will be successful for stockpiling should regrow rapidly and be able to produce 1,785 lbs/ac of forage. In a single pass system, a species that maintains its quality as it matures is a good choice. A study conducted in southwestern Manitoba found that **meadow brome, orchard grass, alfalfa and tall fescue** tend to have good regrowth potential, even under sub-optimal growing conditions. Although, alfalfa does tend to lose its leaves early in the season, so may not be the best suited for stockpiling. The quality of the forages do tend to decrease significantly from December through to March and April. However, with adequate supplementation, stockpiled forages can be used successfully during spring calving on pasture.

FORAGE

Selecting Grasses for Yield

Climatic conditions and type of system will play a big role in forage selection. Under a single graze system, **creeping red fescue and Kentucky bluegrass** tend to retain their nutritive value better as they mature compared to a species like crested wheatgrass or smooth brome. With a long rest period between harvesting and stockpile grazing, species such as smooth and meadow brome generally have higher yields. However, smooth brome tends to have a high loss of dry matter over the winter. In high rainfall situations, orchard grass, quackgrass and timothy are high yielding, but orchardgrass and timothy tend to have a higher dry matter loss over winter than that of meadow brome. Annuals can also be used for stockpiling. Winter crops that are seeded in early to mid May can be used for early grazing and will have adequate time for the forage to recover for stockpiling. Winter cereals that are grown strictly for fall grazing should be seeded by August 1 to ensure adequate yields.

Selecting Grasses for Quality

Speargrass and rough fescue are suitable for grazing when on a native range under a single pass system. They cure on the stem and helps to protect them from weathering. They are also prone to standing up better in the snow. **Meadow brome and creeping red fescue** tend to keep their nutritive value through winter the best compared to others. The quality of the forage is affected by the quality prior to freezing. Live green leaves will have higher quality than dead leaves. Plants that have gone into dormancy due to low moisture conditions prior to snowfall and freeze-up will have leaves with a lower protein, mineral and sugar content. They also tend to have higher fibre levels. If snow arrives while the leaves are still green and not frozen, those plants will remain green and viable throughout most of the winter, with protein levels remaining adequate for dry mature cows.

Table 1. Changes in digestibility and yield of perennial forage regrowth from early fall until the following spring

Species	Harvest date			April yield as a % of September
	September 15	October 15	April 15	
	Digestibility (%)			
Alfalfa	59.3	56.4	34.8	52
Meadow brome/alfalfa	61.6	56.0	45.6	62
Meadow brome	64.8	57.9	50.5	78
Smooth brome	58.3	55.3	37.3	60
Orchardgrass	61.2	57.2	42.7	78
Timothy	61.0	55.8	40.9	97
Crested wheatgrass	62.8	58.3	47.5	65
Kentucky bluegrass	59.1	52.8	44.0	90
Creeping red fescue	62.9	59.7	52.5	82
Quackgrass	60.8	55.1	40.5	75

Source: Agri-Facts Oct 2008

Selecting Legumes for Yield

Alfalfa, cicer milkvetch, sainfoin, red and alsike clover have all been known to be utilized for stockpiling. However, under drier conditions, **alfalfa** tends to yield higher than its counterparts.

Selecting Legumes for Quality

Leaf loss is the limiting factor when it comes to using legumes for stockpiling or grazing in late fall or winter. As the plant continues to mature or experiences a hard frost, the rate at which leaf

loss occurs is quite quick. Consequently, forage quality decreases rapidly. Cicer milkvetch is superior to alfalfa when it comes to leaf retention. It can be grazed later into the season, but both are inadequate for spring grazing.



Grazing

Cows are able to graze through up to 13 inches of initial snow, as long as it soft snow and there is enough forage available underneath to provide an incentive. Using a strip grazing strategy may increase the success of using stockpiled forages. Doing so, helps to stop cows from walking through the snow and causing it to crust and subsequently restrict access to underlying forages. In addition, it helps to decrease the amount of forage trampled into the soft ground in the spring. It is suggested that grazing softer grasses, such as meadow

brome, should be done earlier in the season, so as not to lose it under the snow, whereas harder grasses such as fescue are likely to stay standing and be easier to find and graze under snow. It is recommended that 3-4 inches of residue be left after grazing. Attempting to graze lower than that can result in a loss of body condition due to limiting a cow's daily dry matter intake, regardless of the forage quality. As with summer grazing, leaving that residue will help to conserve moisture, reduce erosion and improve nutrient cycling which all helps to increase the longevity of the pasture stand. Grazing during the dormant season will not harm next year's growth, as long as it is not grazed during the initial summer's growth, that the stand has adequate recovery time and that the plants are not susceptible to winter kill due to loss of snow insulation.

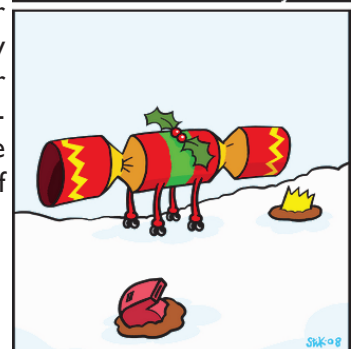
Economic and Environmental Benefits

Cost of maintaining animals is reduced as they are required to harvest their own forage. Where it is feasible, for perennial forages, a multi pass grazing system is more economical than a single pass system. This is due to the costs being spread out over multiple growing cycles. For example, the hay that is harvested initially, can be sold and used to subsidize grazing and fall pasture costs. Corral cleaning and manure spreading costs are greatly reduced and can be eliminated if cattle are kept on pasture all year long.

Nutrients are also returned to the land base for subsequent growing seasons, instead of being concentrated to one area and potentially being lost to runoff and/or leaching. Labour costs are also decreased and spread out throughout the entire year, rather than being concentrated during the winter feeding months. Animals also benefit from being subjected to a cleaner environment whereby fewer disease and infections occur.

It is always important to plan ahead. During the remaining winter period, before spring arrives and life becomes busier, figure out how you might work stockpiled pastures into your grazing rotations for the coming year. It also important, like hay and silage, to test stockpiled pastures in order to have a better idea of what the cattle are actually consuming. This then allows for proper supplementation, if any is required.

WORLD of COW
www.stik.biz By Stik



EVENTS

Biodiesel Workshop

Monday Jan 23 @
High Prairie Legion
10:00am to 4:00pm
Topics include:
- biodiesel production
- making your own
batch
- alternative oilseed
markets
RSVP by Jan 18 to
Morgan 780.835.6799
Jaime 780.523.4033

Forage Agronomy Update

Feb 8 & 9 @ Royal
Executive Inn, Leduc
- updates on research
projects and findings
from govt and industry
representatives
Contact Morgan for
more information.

Marketing Local Foods Workshop

Feb 14 @ Valleyview
Feb 15 @ Grimshaw
10am-4pm
Topics include:
- accessing new mar-
kets
- marketing direct to
consumers
- profit opportunities
- producer stories
RSVP by Feb 10 to
Morgan @ 835.6799

Are you
interested in receiving
our newsletter electroni-
cally. Please send your
email address to
jborduzak@gprc.ab.ca

Akim Omokanye
Research Coordinator
Fairview, AB
780-835-6799
780-835-1112

Jaime Borduzak-Semple
Manager
High Prairie, AB
780-523-4033
780-835-0381

Morgan Hobin
Extension Coordinator / AESA Technician
Fairview, AB
780-835-6799
780-835-8614



Annual General Meeting & 30th Anniversary Celebration

February 10, 2010

@ The Dunvegan Motor Inn
Fairview, AB

4:30 Registration & Meeting

6:00 Supper

8:00 Comic Entertainment

*\$50 per person or \$70 per farm unit,
includes 2012 Annual Membership*

RSVP with Morgan 780-835-6799
Or Jaime 780-523-4033

Bylaw Amendment General Notice to Members

This summer PCBFA had a and audit done on the operations of our association. One issue was brought to our attention about our bylaws. There is no dissolution clause. Below is dissolution clause that will be added to our Bylaws at the Annual general meeting. It is required that we tell all members about the bylaw change two weeks prior to our annual general meeting. If there are any questions or suggestion or for a copy of our bylaws please call Jaime 780-523-4033 or bring it up at our annual meeting in February. Thanks Jaime

Xxviii. Dissolution of Association (added 2011)

- Quorum of voting board of directors must agree to the dissolution of the association
- In the event of the winding up or dissolution of the Society, no assets of the Society shall be distributed to its members.
- In the event of the winding up or the dissolution of Peace Country Beef and Forage Association, the Board of Directors charged with the winding up or dissolution shall, after paying all debts and liabilities of the Society and fulfilling all contractual obligations, distribute or dispose of the remaining assets of the Society to a non-profit organization registered in Alberta who they feel most appropriate, given the circumstances that prevail at that point in time.