



## In Dry Conditions, Delay Spring Grazing!

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FORAGE

Although this winter was pleasant and we could likely count the number of big snow events on one hand, it has left many areas of the Peace in a low moisture situation. Soil conditions are dry and snow packs were below average. This creates concern among livestock producers as to whether there will be adequate spring moisture available to jump start their hay and pasture stands, in addition to filling their dugouts. Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's (ARD) forage seed specialist, Calvin Yoder, says that May and early June rains will be critical in initiating good hay and pasture growth for the year. All the moisture the Peace did receive last year was sucked up and utilized by those plants that were so desperately needing it, thanks to earlier drought conditions. As a result, livestock producers are being cautioned to delay spring grazing.



As the grass starts to turn that wonderful green, producers are once again poised for that seasonal job of being a grass manager. There will be many decisions that need to be made before the cows are ever turned out. Many producers have a good stock of hay remaining from a decent winter, so if turn out is delayed, it is fair to say that there won't be much, if any, of a requirement to purchase any extra feed. However, there is a bit of a tradeoff to consider, this being either continuing to feed, delaying the impact of grazing on pastures versus turning out to relieve the cost of feeding.

ARD grazing and forage specialist, Grant Lastiwka, suggests that because there was a lack of late summer and fall moisture, hay and pasture stands will be later to start this year. In order to give the forage stand a chance to get started, producers should keep their herds off the pastures and delay grazing for at least a week. However this could be more, depending on when the rain starts to fall this spring. Although, this may change, depending on the snow melt and the amount of moisture we get in April/May before the plants begin to actively grow.

Research suggests that plants are at their most vulnerable prior to the 3 leaf stage and it is recommended that pastures are not grazed until the 4 leaf stage or at least 6 to 8 inches tall. If the pasture has a high proportion of legumes, it is advisable that they are not grazed until 8 to 12 inches in height.

Putting cattle out onto pasture land too early can result in a reduction of forage produced throughout the year. Grazing a pasture too early can also lead to the vegetation being removed

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# EVENTS

## Clear Hills Agricultural Trade Show

April 14 - Hines Creek  
Stop by our booth and say hello! It is also a good time to get your 2012 membership if you haven't already!!!

## Social Media/EFP/ Age Verification Workshops

Apr 17 - High Prairie (Technology Centre)

Apr 18 - Fairview (Campus - AnSci 143)

Apr 19 - Clairmont (Municipal Services Bldg)  
9:00am to 4:00pm

Topics:

- Age Verification
- Social Media & Twitter
- Environmental Farm Plans

Register with:

Morgan @ 835.6799

Jill @ 567.5585

## Pasture Walks

June/July/Aug

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before the plants have had the chance to replenish root reserves. If a pasture is grazed 1 week too early in the spring, 3 weeks of grazing time will be lost in the fall. There has been research done in North Dakota that has found that by turning cattle out too early on pasture, the reduction in the year's total forage production be more than 50%. This loss in herbage can also result in reductions in stocking rates, calf average daily gain, calf gain per acre, net returns per cow-calf pair and net returns per acre. With regard to the total feed budget, it may be wise to continue feeding as an investment in order to protect future pasture production.

If there is sufficient residual left, such as grasses that were stockpiled, an early grazing may be suitable. However, it is recommended that an early graze should be done quickly, allowing an adequate amount left over for productive regrowth. The cattle should then be on the move to the next area.

It is also important to remember that being a grazer with good management strategies, means being flexible. And a "rule-of-thumb" to consider is that a pasture should never be grazed the same time of the year, two years in a row. This relates to calving pastures as well. Many operations have their calving pasture in the same place. Although there may not be an ability to change the calving area, there still may be the flexibility to choose the pasture location where those cow-calf pairs will then begin grazing. The idea behind this grazing rotation is to put the pressure on those preferred plants at different parts of the season during different years. If this isn't done, those species will lose their vigour and tend to disappear from the stand within a few years.

As Victor Shelton, a grazing specialist from the United States says, there is no way to predict the future and what spring will bring. Therefore, there should always be a contingency plan for any unexpected and/or adverse conditions that might occur. Therefore, as a bit of insurance, always have some hay on hand, don't overstock, move often and maintain cover no matter what.

## New Employees at PCBFA!

PCBFA would like to welcome our new Extension & ASB Project Coordinator, **Karlah Rudolph**. She will begin Monday April 16 and will be based out of the High Prairie office.

We would also like to welcome our first summer student, **Kaitlin McLachlan**. She will begin May 1 and will be based out of the Fairview office.

In the next Forage Facts edition, you will be sure to find out more about Karlah and Kaitlin!



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