

NEWS COLUMN

Jeff Lounsbury, Extension Educator/Livestock
October 24, 2008

Grazing Alfalfa in the Fall

What do you do with late fall alfalfa growth? This is a common question from producers this time of year. Alfalfa quality at this time of the year is very good; however, weather conditions are generally not the most ideal for drying the crop. Yields may not cover harvest cost if the crop is short. The use of grazing late fall alfalfa may be the least costly and most convenient harvest method available.

One main concern with grazing alfalfa anytime is the threat of bloat. There is research indicating bloat potential increases after frost. The risk of bloat with grazing can be minimized with proper management. Some considerations are:

- Fill cattle with dry hay or grass before turning on to the alfalfa.
- Turn cattle on alfalfa later in the day in order to avoid early morning frost and dew on the plants.
- Don't allow cattle to get empty before entering a new alfalfa stand.
- Observe cattle twice daily when they are grazing alfalfa.
- Feed cattle an anti-foaming agent two to five days before turning on alfalfa.
- Provide other filler forages such as dry hay or crop residues to cattle while they are grazing alfalfa.

It is crucial that alfalfa is not over-grazed. Also with all the recent moisture make sure the ground firms up before cattle are turned out. Crown damage can be a major concern with cattle traffic on soft or muddy fields. While stubble height is not a great concern during summer cuttings, it should be considered during late fall grazing. A minimum of six inches should be left to catch and hold snow during winter months. Snow cover helps prevent damage from winter kill factors including excessive temperature swings, ice layers and heaving.

Cattle Scale For Producer Use

In 2001 the Lincoln and Turner County Extension offices through the generous sponsorship of many local individuals and businesses purchased a portable cattle scale for producers to utilize.

It is designed to help cattlemen get an idea of the performance of their cattle enterprise. Not much can be known without taking weights at weaning time or before and after placing cattle on feed. Cattle have for the most part always been marketed by weight and as long as that remains the standard, producers need to have access to tools that allow them to accurately gather that information.

In addition, there are various computer programs such as (CHAPS) cow herd appraisal for performance software that can be helpful to beef producers. However, in order to utilize the program fall cow and calf weaning weights are needed.

The scale is fully portable with hitch pin and safety chain. It can be acquired for \$20 per day. The scale read out runs on a 12-volt battery.

The scale can be rented by calling the Lincoln County Extension office at 764-2756.

In addition to producer use the scale is also be heavy utilized in the 4-H livestock project areas in both Turner and Lincoln Counties.