



This newsletter is a joint effort from the following organizations:



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Grazing Tips for 2015

By John Zinn NRCS Grazing Specialist

As I write this, spring seems a long way away. In this third week of February we are dealing with single digit and below zero temps. However, calving, lambing, and in some places kidding (in some places the kidding never ends) have begun and with it a new production year.

Treating Your Pastures Like a Crop

Although a typical well managed rotationally grazed pasture will result in better nutrient distribution, over time, livestock pull nutrients out of the pasture as they are sold off the farm. Assuming a 20% nutrient reduction per year, soil test levels can quickly decline. Other fertility losses may occur. Potassium leaches through the soil profile, while nitrogen losses through denitrification and phosphorous losses through runoff, particularly in pastures that get grazed short, can be significant.

Pulling soil samples to determine the nutrient status of pastures and fertilizing to recommended levels will keep them yielding to their full potential. However, much of the improved production can be wasted.



Harvest Efficiency

Given a large area to roam around, livestock can be wasteful with valuable feed. Many producers would never consider feeding round bales without a bale ring, but don't have their pastures subdivided to improve on their forage utilization. Continuously grazed pasture efficiency is around 30% while a simple rotational grazing system with six subdivisions, a six day grazing period, allowing the forages to recover after grazing, will increase efficiency to 50-60%. (Even better grazing efficiency can be had with more subdivisions and more rest.)

If a pasture is capable of producing 6000 pounds of dry matter per acre per year and is grazed at a 30% efficiency, 1800 pounds of dry matter is actually harvested. If a rotationally grazed pasture achieves a modest 50% efficiency, the dry matter harvest increases to 3000 pounds per acre. If that dry matter is worth 6 cents per pound, that translates to an additional \$72 per acre per year of feed harvested.

Soil Health

Back in the day, we ignored the importance of microorganisms in the soil. Now we know that these organisms channel nutrients to plants and their health is essential to the well being and productivity of all plants. Perennial plants that don't get disturbed by tillage are connected by soil fungi through literally miles of living tissue. The fungi pipe nutrients from plant to plant. We also know that if pasture plants stay taller in a rotational grazing system, they will develop a better root system and the interaction of the soil microbes on the surface of the roots is the place where soil aggregates form. The black productive soils of Minnesota are a result of thousands of years of soil aggregate formation on the deep roots of native grasses.

Benefits of Healthy Soils

Improved infiltration rates- suck up the water that falls on the pasture for later use. Wow have we seen the importance of this lately. It rains for a month and then quits for two months. Improved available water holding capacity- sands take up water rapidly but don't hold it! Soils with higher organic matter can store it for later use. Is this useful! Improved Nutrient Storage- Soils with higher organic matter hold nutrients for later use by plants through the soil microorganisms.

Use Cover Crops and Crop Residues to Extend the Grazing Season

Cover crops improve the soil but can also provide additional forage for early spring when sown at the typical time in late summer in standing corn or beans. Some folks with canning crops may be able to get some forage in the fall from cover crops. For more information on species to seed and rates refer to the **Midwest Cover Crop Decision Tool-Field Crops**

(<http://mcccddev.anr.msu.edu/VertIndex.php>) or the **Smart Mix Calculator**. Technical assistance also is available through your local farm supplier, Extension, Soil and Water District or NRCS. Corn and bean fields can provide low quality forage that meets the needs of dry, pregnant beef cows and other ruminants with low nutrient needs. Supplemental feeding may make it a choice for other animal classes, but we recommend you consult with an animal nutritionist before considering this option.



Well, I hope this gives you something to “chew on” and that by the time you read this that the first signs of spring are making their way to your place.

Sesquicentennial Farm Applications Due April 1

Minnesota Farm Bureau's Sesquicentennial Farm program will honor Minnesota families who have owned their farms for at least 150 years. Since the Sesquicentennial Farm program began in 2008, over 200 farms have been recognized. The Sesquicentennial Farm program recognizes family farms according to the following qualifications:

1. The farm must be at least 150 years old this year (2015) according to the abstract of title, land patent, original deed, county land records, court file in registration proceedings or other authentic land records. **Please do not send originals or copies of records.**
2. Your family must have owned the farm for 150 years or more. "Family" is defined as parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, first cousins and direct in-laws (father, mother, brother, sister, daughter, son-in-law).
3. Continuous residence on farm is not required, but ownership must be continuous.
4. The farm should consist of 50 or more acres and currently be involved in agricultural production.

Applications are available by writing Sesquicentennial Farms, Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation, P.O. Box 64370, St. Paul, MN 55164; website, www.fbm.org; email info@fbmn.org; or call [651-768-2100](tel:651-768-2100). Previously recognized families should not reapply.

Century Farms are not automatically recognized as Sesquicentennial Farms. Families must apply to receive Sesquicentennial Farm recognition. Recipients will be announced early June. A commemorative certificate will be awarded to qualifying families, along with an outdoor sign signifying Sesquicentennial Farm recognition. To see a list of previously recognized Sesquicentennial Farms in Minnesota, visit fbmn.org/pages/century-and-sesquicentennial-farm.

Minnesota Farm Bureau – Farmers • Families • Food is comprised of 78 local Farm Bureau associations across Minnesota. Members make their views known to political leaders, state government officials, special interest groups and the general public. Programs for young farmers and ranchers develop leadership skills and improve farm management. Promotion and Education Committee members work with programs such as Ag in the Classroom and safety education for children. Join Farm Bureau today and support efforts to serve as an advocate for rural Minnesota, www.fbm.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Tuesday, March 3 ~ **Strategies to Manage Phosphorus on Livestock Farms**, 9:30 am -2:00 pm, Fillmore County Office Building, Room 108, Preston. Refreshments and noon meal provided, no registration fee, to pre-register contact 507-765-3896

Saturday March 7 ~ **District 1 SE MN Farm Bureau Meeting**: at Bowlocity Entertainment Center 2810 North Broadway Rochester MN, 6:30-8:00 p.m. Meeting 8:00 p.m. Bowling cost is \$8 per person – don't have to be a member

March 21 ~ **District 1 Young Farmers and Ranchers Spring Tour** – Contact Katie Brenny, MFBF SE Area Program Director at 507-932-1779 or katie.brenny@fbmn.org for more info.

Public Policy Town Hall Conference Call: 888-354-0094 passcode 6589665# at noon for an update on happenings at the capitol and in DC; Feb 27, March 13 & 27



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