

Keep learning; apply what you learn

AN old friend used to say a forage expert we both knew thought the word “management” meant fertilizer and herbicide.

His point was the man either knew nothing about how forages grow and regrow after grazing or he was ignoring all the things we know.

It’s a point many folks should think about. We know more today than ever before about how to manage forage and manipulate grazing in a manner that produces more and better forage. Yet arguably there is still very little of that knowledge being applied.

On the plus side, a great many people have learned to graze and let pastures recover in the past 15 years, but to really get control of the stock and manage forage takes more than three or five pastures, and it takes more than rotation. There is much more to be learned and applied than simply moving animals into a different pasture when it appears they’re running out of grass.

In fact, some of the old haying research showed exactly what the great practical grazing managers of today have learned. For those of you who put up hay, in particular, here’s a question: What time in the life of a plant produces the best combination of quantity and quality?

If you said pre-boot or early boot stage, or just before the plant goes into reproduction, you’ve discovered my meaning. Why wouldn’t that be the best time to graze the plants, too?

That’s what Walt Davis, who writes the *Grazier’s Gazette* column for this magazine, taught me many years ago. It’s also what he and others suppose the great herds of herbivores on every continent tried to do — move about to hit forage at a stage where it could supply adequate mouthfuls for the least amount of grazing effort, fill the rumens of many thousands of animals, and yet still provide them adequate nutrition. Interestingly, American bison have shown themselves to be even pickier eaters than domestic cattle when given the choice. But cattle and bison both have shown they eat more competitively in herds.

As an interesting aside, Chad Peterson, featured in this issue for his “mob” grazing techniques, has found bison will not tolerate quite as much crowding as cattle. Historical reports say bison grazed by the hundreds of thousands, but appear to have spread widely across the countryside in extended family groups of 2,000 to 5,000.

Anyway, I need to get to my point before I digress into a rabbit hole from which I can’t climb back to here.

The key to our new knowledge about forage is timing of grazing/harvest. That must be combined with an understanding of plant physiology, grazing behavior and the effects of stock density on harvest uniformity.

When you’re harvesting forage with a machine, you still must understand timing, even though harvest is always even and complete. Still it helps to know plants cut off with a little more residual

Of Bovine ilk

Alan Newport
anewport@
farmprogress.com



leaf material can still photosynthesize and will regrow much faster than plants cut off at the ground; they must rely entirely on energy reserves in the crown to regrow.

There’s as much to know about forage as there is about corn or cotton, but

we’ve been very poor at learning it up to now. I think it’s about time we move up to a higher plateau, and I believe better forage management, as a part of better overall management, has the greatest untapped profit potential of anything in our industry.

Beef producers can't be everywhere



Dave Petty
Beef producer
Eldora, Iowa



“Over the years, the beef checkoff has delivered dividends on my investment through increased demand for our product. The checkoff funds research that builds consumer confidence and awareness of how beef fits into a healthy lifestyle,” says Dave Petty.

“The development of the flat iron steak is a terrific example of how our checkoff dollars work to bring value back to beef producers. Our investment funded research that identified the flat iron steak, and then our promotion dollars got the word out to consumers, building demand for this product.”

By investing in the checkoff, producers like Dave Petty have helped increase the value of the chuck by an estimated \$60* per head. “At the end of the day, our checkoff increases consumer awareness and the use of beef in today’s diet.”

My beef checkoff...extending our reach to help build beef demand.

*Source - CattleFax



Get to know your checkoff and hear more from Dave Petty at MyBeefCheckoff.com

Funded by the Beef Checkoff.