

The First Graze of Spring on Native Warm Season Grasses

These are the principles, tips and tricks discussed in the video by the same name. For a more in-depth discussion of these principles, watch the video at <https://youtu.be/UW8Ca4A8ppU>

Other videos in this series discuss grazing through the summer and into the fall and winter as well as other management for Native Warm Season Grasses (NWSG).

1. Graze NWSG as soon as it is ready instead of catching up on the cool season pastures.
Rationale for this includes:
 - a. NWSG quality is much higher in spring than cool season pastures (NWSG at this time have the potential for 4 pounds of gain per day).
 - b. Ungrazed NWSG will lose quality quickly if not used because plants begin to go reproductive.
 - c. Tall fescue toxins increase rapidly in spring.
 - d. Protect your cool season grasses as they go into semi-dormancy caused by the heat of summer to maximize forage production on cool season pastures.
2. It takes grass to grow grass. These are ways to look at a NWSG pasture when grazing for the first graze of spring.
 - a. It is very important to manage tall grasses so that while grazing the plant has enough residual left over that is tall enough to recover and regrow without using its root reserves. If done correctly the regrowth will happen much faster.
 - b. Manage by the rule of thirds. Often cattle will graze a NWSG pasture by grazing off the top third of the plants then the middle third then finally the bottom third. When only the top third is grazed, there is little pause in the growth of the plant as it recovers. If the cattle remain and the middle third is grazed, it will take longer to recover. If the cattle remain longer, they take the final and third bite off the plants, the quality of forage will be much less and the plant will need a much larger period of time to recover and regrow.

Why manage tall grasses tall?

- a. NWSG have a tall growing point (meristem), and when it is grazed off, the time to regrow is much greater.
 - b. You must learn to manage any new forage and understand what is best for that forage.
3. Principles for the first graze of spring
 - a. Don't graze the roots. In other words, the plant begins growth in the spring with energy from the root reserves and eventually it is able to grow from active photosynthesis. Graze in such a manner that the plant doesn't have to regrow

from the root reserves again, which happens when all of the leaves are grazed off.

- b. Stock heavy early, especially with switchgrass, because it will keep the plants vegetative and keep quality and animal performance high. Some studies indicate that an early haying can also be a useful tool.
 - c. Don't wait too long to start grazing in the spring (don't let it get too tall) because the knock down is worse and the quality for the rest of the summer will become lower.
4. Real world application. Sometimes it is hard to graze everything just right because it's hard to be everywhere at the same time. If this is the case, begin to graze anytime once the NWSG is green and growing but graze very quickly and lightly with a goal of grazing off only $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{3}$ of each plant.

As you begin grazing, don't get too nervous, learn a few principles then just try something and learn from it!