



## BeefTalk 712: Grass Turnout Date is More Than a Desire

### SUPPORTING MATERIALS

#### Have a Grazing Plan!

*A producer sleeps much better when 30 pounds of dry matter per day are known to be available for a 1,200 pound cow while she is grazing.*

*In the production world, producing beef from grass depends on the development of grazing plans that allow plants to fully utilize their genetics that have evolved for centuries.*

Evidence of the calving season in the northern Great Plains is clear. All one needs to do is drive down any road and look at the pastures. You will see lots of calves bouncing around on warm days.

The cows seem content, and one may even notice a producer or two out and about checking the cows. Generally, there are

strips of hay spread across the pasture or side of the hill to make sure the cows have adequate feed during this critical part of their life.

To the astute manager, spring and summer grass management should be the question of the day because there is this strong tendency to start opening gates and letting the cows graze beyond the calving pasture. Simply put, that is a mistake. Grazing cattle before the grass is ready actually impedes good grass development. The producer will pay for that early grazing mistake later in the season, especially if the grazing season is short on moisture.

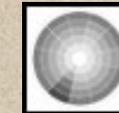
The cow business is a grass business. Despite the wide range in annual weather and associated environments, grass plants seem to adjust quite well. However, in the production world, producing beef from grass depends on the development of grazing plans that allow plants to fully utilize their genetics that have evolved for centuries. In fact, the basis of a good grazing system is understanding grass plants so that grass management is compatible with the evolved plants. It is well known that cool- and warm-season grasses are distinctly different, but both are required to have an effective grazing program.

The same would be true as a producer travels north and south. Northern grazing systems are going to be different than southern grazing systems. In fact, travel just a few hundred miles in any direction and you will find producers with different grass programs. However, the fundamental principles will not change.

Granted, alternative uses can be created, but the original native upper Great Plains prairies were and still are a cattle producer's dream. Not utilizing this resource in a sustaining way will cost the current and future producer. The bottom



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line is that effective grazing strategies utilize cattle because cattle do a good job of keeping grasslands healthy.

If there is a golden rule among a producer's grazing plans, it is simply to have a plan. The plan should reflect known biological principles that enhance perennial grass production and be manageable by the producer.

For example, at the Dickinson Research Extension Center, the grazing season starts in May. The cows and calves will be turned out on crested wheat pasture in early May and remain there until the end of May. Like some producers, the DREC may turn out the cattle the last week of April because the general rule of thumb for cool-season grasses is to turn out the cattle at the third-leaf stage. The center sets dates within its plan but adjusts for yearly seasonal changes.

The four weeks of grazing cool-season grass provides a good start for the summer grazing season. As the summer grazing season is planned, effective rotation systems will help harvest very heavy calves and keep the grasslands in peak condition for centuries to come. Dates are key, as are proper stocking rates that fit the location.

As in past years (decades?), the center will start cow-calf pair grazing on native range at the start of June. The pairs will be sent to their second rotational pasture by mid-June and to their third pasture at the end of June. Three pastures with a quick rotation will be completed by mid-July. This allows for the stimulation of the grass plants, which increases pasture productivity.

Following the first round of short rotations through the three pastures, the pastures will be grazed again for approximately 30 days each to complete the grazing season in mid-October. The principle is to stimulate the grass plant and then follow that with more utilization later in the grazing season.

There are other plans, but the important point from the producer's perspective is to consult with a local range scientist to develop a good, solid plan. The NDSU Extension Service or Natural Resources Conservation Service, located in almost every county in the country, can help a producer get started. For now, enjoy those cool-season grasses, but the end of May will be here quickly.

Long-term grazing systems work, and all grass should be part of a planned system.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>. For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

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