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## BeefTalk: Rain Makes Regrowth; Put Weight on Cows Now



### Fall is the time to take advantage of crop aftermath grazing.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

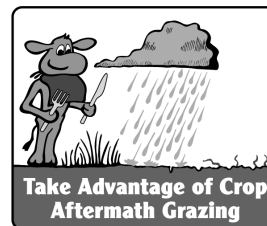
Commit this truism to memory: Feed is available for cattle.

In fact, if we did not have cattle and sheep, acre upon acre of forage would be grossly underutilized. Even in dry years, forage is present. Sometimes we need to search, but still, forage is present.

### Images



Take Advantage of Crop Aftermath Grazing



Take Advantage of Crop Aftermath Grazing

## columns

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**[BeefTalk: BeefTalk: The World is Good, but Sometimes Saying That is Hard](#)** (2017-10-05) Remember that tomorrow is another day filled with hope. [FULL STORY](#)


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Of course, dollars need to be balanced against location, and affordable forage is different than available forage. We hope affordable and available forage is forthcoming.

Cattle producers count on fall regrowth, which literally can blossom in years such as this after a dry summer. We hope fall rains, which arrived recently in generalized patterns, will spread across the Plains, adding moisture for some late-season, copious plant life.

North Dakota livestock graze 10,247,184 acres of permanent pasture and rangeland, according to the 2012 Census of Agriculture ( <https://www.agcensus.usda.gov>). The 2012 report noted a total 27,147,240 acres of cropland, which means potentially 27 million additional acres are available for livestock use after the crop harvest. That is nearly three more acres for every acre livestock had previously.

Yes, much of that land is not fenced, and lacks water or landowner desire to run cattle on the land. Yet many livestock producers are crop producers and the opportunity is present. Cattle respond well to electric fencing, so ask the neighbor.

I just may be overly optimistic on a beautiful fall day, but resourcefulness is the mother of all agriculture. Alternative land use exists. In 2012, 321,936 acres of cropland were used for grazing.

Cover crops and soil health accounted for 2,665,385 acres. And 2,163,579 acres were enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program.

Cattle are the foundation for alternative production systems that improve soil health. Oops, sorry; I'm just being overly optimistic and trying to utilize the natural resources available.

The marriage of cattle, sheep and expansive cropping systems that include cover crops has us at the Dickinson Research Extension Center planning for more forage-filled days. More on that later, but back to the truism: Fall is the time to take advantage of crop aftermath grazing.

Make sure the grazing restrictions related to herbicide use are followed, adequate adaptation time is allowed prior to introduction of the cattle to a new forage source and forage analysis is completed for potential cattle health complications. I'm starting to sound like one of those medical commercials, but err on the safe side.

If the calves already have been weaned, the cows will gain exceptionally well, and if the calves have made the season so far grazing beside their mother, the same is true. Still, consider weaning the calves if the general cow herd is thin.

The second trimester for a cow's pregnancy begins early to mid-September when bulls are turned out June 1. The third trimester starts Dec. 12. A positive opportunity to position the cows for

calving and re-breeding next year begins now. Take advantage of this and evaluate winter plans. Feed inventory, cattle inventory, pasture usage and prepping calves for weaning are all on the table.

The year has been a tough one, but a good planning exercise is critical to minimize financial setbacks for the operation. Remember, September started a window of nutritional change for cow herds that had an early June bull turnout. The current nice fall weather is a big plus to offset the summer challenges.

If the cows are thin, now would be a good time to purchase some supplement because weight gain is difficult once cows enter the last third of gestation, when the ever-growing calf and cold winter nights take a toll. The point is, cows need to be in good condition at calving next spring and even better condition at breeding next summer.

The time to put weight on the cow is the middle trimester of pregnancy. Milk production is decreasing or done if the calves are weaned. If one purchases cow supplement, wean the calves first. Calves are best fed in the lots, and you have no need to supplement milk production in the fall by supplementing the cow. Feed the calf directly, in a feed bunk.

In closing, crop aftermath is starting to become very evident as fall regrowth across the area.

When I drive by fields that are not fenced nor have access to water, I always ponder how much a cow would enjoy the crop aftermath buffet if water and fencing could be done. The cows certainly would gain weight because eating in excess of their requirements means weight gain.

Even better, sort the thinner cows and send them to the best fall pastures. Again, these pastures will put the needed feed in front of the thinner cows and add some supplement, and the cows will improve body condition score. The moderate- to heavier-conditioned cows can be grazing areas that are less lush but do not need access to additional supplementation.

Make an appointment with your nutritionist and enjoy fall grazing.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact your local NDSU Extension Service agent (<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/directory>) or Ringwall at the Dickinson Research Extension Center, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601; 701-456-1103; or [✉kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu](mailto:kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu).

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## Attachments



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[Aftermath Grazing](#)

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