



When Is It Time To Stop Grazing In The Fall?

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Fall pasture growth often provides additional opportunity for grazing livestock; however, careful management of pastures is essential for the over-wintering of forages and improvement into the next growing season. The dry summer this year has stunted fall pasture regrowth dramatically and for many supplementation is necessary. If it rains, pastures may start to re-grow and producers may consider leaving cattle on pasture to save on forage supplies.

Fall grazing these summer pastures at this time could be detrimental to your forage stand if not managed carefully. If livestock are allowed to continue grazing late into the fall and early winter, the grasses are eaten too close to the ground, weakening the pasture grasses, which can lead to very slow growth in the spring or death.

During the fall or after these recent rains, perennial pasture forages are experiencing the development of new shoots which is the forage that you may be considering to graze. As well as this new crop of leaves, the plant is undergoing root regeneration. During the period of root regeneration, carbohydrates are being stored as an essential part of the root rebuilding process, which provides the necessary stores for proper over-wintering. These carbohydrates are stored within the crown and roots of the plant, which is generally in the lower 3-4 inches of the plant in cool season perennial pastures.

Grazing grass below three inches stresses the plant by reducing the leaf surface which grasses use to make their own food, thus forcing them to use up food reserves stored in their roots.

This is why it is critical that pastures are never grazed below a 3-4 inch stubble height at any point in the season, but especially during the fall. It is often recommended to leave higher stubble height—often 4-5"—in the fall to give pastures a chance to store those carbohydrates that will give them a “jump start” the following spring. If plants are grazed below the growing point, nutrient stores will be depleted and the “protection” from stress will be dramatically reduced. Overgrazing during the fall inhibits regeneration of the root system and the development of new shoots for the next season’s growth.

Implementing a rotational or strip grazing system can help to manage grazing height by reducing paddock size and increasing the ability to monitor plant residue height. There are ways to extend your grazing season into the early winter without damaging your summer pastures. Additional planning and management is needed to achieve that. For some suggested strategies, go to [A Quick Guide to Extended Grazing](https://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/crops/production/forages/pubs/quick_guide_extended_grazing.pdf):

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Now is the time to start thinking about your pastures for next spring.