



Overgrazing Pastures This Fall

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Although there is still plenty of grass to be grazed this year, it's not too early to consider what management your pastures will need going into winter so that they can remain productive come spring.

The MGFA article from last year's [Fall Pasture Management: https://files.constantcontact.com/cc34cd19101/59143f18-563a-4fae-92dd-0b64e49815f5.pdf](https://files.constantcontact.com/cc34cd19101/59143f18-563a-4fae-92dd-0b64e49815f5.pdf) covered a lot of the reasons for not overgrazing your pastures:

- Delay plant regrowth and recovery, setting the pasture up for another round of overgrazing
- Inhibit the development of new tillers
- Result in the removal of plant carbohydrate storage structures at the base of the plant
- Encourage weed encroachment
- Severely impact root mass and growth
- Make soils more vulnerable to erosion
- Negatively impact livestock performance

These are all good reasons to not overgraze your pastures not only after the drought of 2021 but even in what might be considered a “normal” growing season.

So why are we talking about **overgrazing** pastures this fall?

There may be a few situations where overgrazing a **limited** number of paddocks may benefit your operation.

When grass starts growing in the spring, it all starts at the same time. Without intense management, grasses in the later grazed pastures/paddocks can be overly mature by the time your cattle get through a pasture rotation. This can result in lower gains due to quality or grasses that aren't kept in the vegetative stage decreasing its production potential.

Knowing that plant growth slows in the fall results in decreased regeneration of top growth and root mass. Overgrazing removes these lower grass stems, further compromising stored carbohydrate reserves in the roots and crown and slowing the first flush of grass in the spring.

Overgrazing in the fall can also reduce the number of late-season tillers that are formed in the fall. The tillers that develop in the fall are where new growth begins in the spring.

If removed in the fall, the plant will need to send out new tillers from the crown in the spring before growth can start.

So here is where, in specific situations, overgrazing could be an effective strategy to stagger spring regrowth. Grazing certain pastures shorter in the fall will delay green up in the spring, and these paddocks can be set aside for the back end of the grazing rotation that year. It offers one a means of controlling what is commonly referred to as “the spring flush” where all paddocks are ready to graze at the same time.

Another case where overgrazing in the fall might be beneficial is for paddocks that will be in frost or over seeded the following spring. Overgrazing, or at least getting growth down to a 3-inch stubble, in the fall will expose more bare soil for improved seed-to-soil contact, and this will also reduce early competition from existing plants with the new establishing seedlings.

To be clear, overgrazing a pasture in the fall is by no means a practice that should be promoted or practiced by any grazier. The exceptions might be if either of these two situations fit into your operation.