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Fall Grazing Decisions Can Affect Pasture Productivity Next Spring

As summer gives way to fall across southeast Kansas, livestock producers should begin thinking about how end-of-season grazing decisions may impact pasture health and forage production well into next year.

According to K-State's Range Management Specialist Molly Reichenborn, the transition from the growing season into dormancy is a critical time for pasture management. Whether producers are ending their grazing season, utilizing stockpiled forage during the winter months, or combining multiple grazing strategies throughout the year, decisions made now can have lasting effects on grass stands and future productivity.

"As plants prepare for winter, they rely on their remaining leaf area to capture sunlight and store energy reserves," Powell said. "Those reserves help support winter survival and fuel vigorous growth the following spring."

Grazing too heavily late in the season can limit a plant's ability to replenish those reserves. While producers often focus on the amount of forage available today, it is equally important to consider the long-term health of the pasture.

For southeast Kansas producers, maintaining adequate residual forage height is one of the simplest and most effective management practices. Reichenborn recommends leaving a minimum grazing height of 6 - 8 inches in tallgrass rangeland, 4 - 6 inches in mixed-grass rangeland

If you're grazing cool season pasture grasses this fall (e.g., fescue, brome) or grazing stockpiled tame forage over the fall and/or winter, leaving at least 3 to 4 inches of residue until the following growing season is typically recommended to preserve stand productivity and health.

"Many of our producers have seen good forage growth early this summer, but it's important not to graze that extra forage too hard going into dormancy," Powell said. "Maintaining adequate stubble height now can help preserve plant vigor, improve stand persistence, and support pasture productivity next year."

Producers planning to graze stockpiled forage during the dormant season should also develop a strategy that balances livestock nutritional needs with long-term pasture goals. Careful grazing

management can help extend forage resources, reduce winter feed costs, and maintain desirable plant communities.

With frost approaching in the coming weeks, now is an excellent time to evaluate pasture conditions, estimate available forage, and make grazing plans that support both cattle performance and pasture sustainability.

For more information on grazing management, stockpiling forage, or evaluating pasture conditions, contact Wendie Powell, Livestock Production Agent, (620) 378-2167, wendiepowell@ksu.edu.

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