

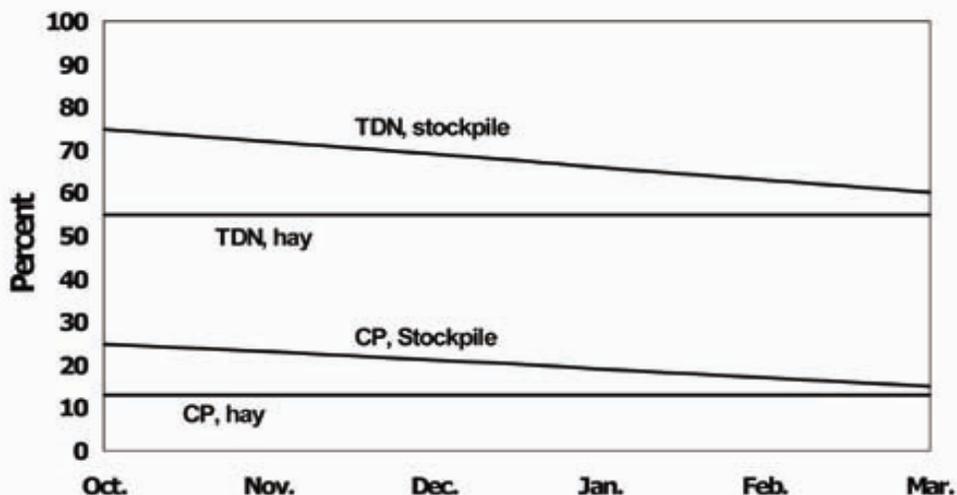
Everyday Cattle Graze is Money Saved

Garry D. Lacefield
Extension Forage Specialist
University of Kentucky

During one of my first visits to New Zealand over twenty years ago, I had the opportunity to visit many different dairy, beef, sheep and deer farms. While visiting a dairy farm, I remember the farmer telling me about his grazing program and their goal to “optimize grazing and minimize stored feed.” I remember him saying, “everyday grazed is money saved”. I admit, the reality of that statement didn’t truly sink in that day; but over the years, the truth of what he said has not only “sunk in” but has been reinforced by visits to other farms literally around the world as well as throughout the U.S. and Kentucky. In addition, several research studies have further verified this universal truth.

Research and farmer experience has clearly shown that the best predictor of profitability in the beef industry is simply “how much (cost) of hay/silage required to winter animals”? How many days and how much hay/silage will you have to feed to your animals this winter? Nutrients in the form of grazed pasture are usually cheaper than nutrients in hay. In addition, we know that quality of grazed pasture is usually higher than quality in that same plant harvested as hay (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Quality of stockpiled fescue v. hay on nine Arkansas farms



Source: University of Missouri

Mr. Ed Ballard will discuss more specific details on his research and experience in Illinois. I want to emphasize my part with a study conducted by Jim Gerrish while at the University of Missouri (Table 1). He compared a typical tall fescue grazing system to various systems to extend the grazing system. With the tall fescue system, hay was fed 130 days at a cost of \$1.32 per cow per day. This resulted in a watering cost per cow of \$172. Regardless of the grazing system used “everyday grazed was money saves”. Stockpiling reduced hay feeding days from 130 to 70, cost per cow per day from \$1.32 to \$0.31, and cost for wintering each cow by \$102.00

Table 1. Daily and seasonal forage costs for alternative wintering strategies at typical yield, costs, and period of use based on 100 – cow herd.				
Winter feeding period from Dec 1 to April 10				
Forage source	Hay	Cornstalks	Stockpiled tall fescue	Ryegrass + cereal rye
\$/cow/day	\$1.32	\$0.05	\$0.31	\$0.61
Days of use	130	60 stalks	90 graze	90 graze
	Hay	70 hay	40 hay	40 hay
Wintering cost	\$172	\$122	\$70	\$108

There are many possibilities for starting grazing earlier, having better grazing during summer when our cool season grasses are less productive and for extending the grazing season later into fall and winter. Our challenge is to “optimize grazing and minimize stored feed” with a goal of grazing more of what we produce, grazing in a higher quality stage and extending the grazing season. Let me conclude with a reminder “everyday grazed is money saved”.

Selected References

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U.K. Forage Website – www.uky.edu/Aq/Forage