Hello, and welcome to the small farms podcast, a production of the small farms program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with rural life. In this episode, I visit with Denise Schwab Extension Beef Specialist for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Today we're talking about fall grazing and winter forage concerns. I'm Christa Hartsook, small farms program manager and we hope you enjoy the show. Denise, welcome. Thanks for being back.

Thank you.

So let's talk a little bit. We're clearly into our fall months here. We're going to be coming on winter real soon. We know we've got some concerns, I think with managing our fall pastures, obviously differently than we do our summer pastures. Can you kind of walk us through what we need to think about there?

Sure. So summer pastures, we've got growing forages. And so we've got a lot of forgiveness as that plant is growing. When we get into fall, we have little or no, no forage growth. So we're basically using up what we stockpiled through the summer. And so we have to manage that a little differently, we don't have that forgiveness of regrowth. So one of the big keys to remember is as we're grazing first, we want to give the plants time to put some energy in the gas tank, so put some reserves down into that root system. And we have to do that during the growing season. So ideally, if we want to fall winter graze, we probably want to stop grazing that pasture around early August, and let it get a nice big growth on it, get a nice root reserve
into it. And then after a killing freezer, when growth pretty well stops, then we can go and take that top growth off. But we’re not going to harm the root system or the gas tank that's going to get started in the springtime. Unfortunately, for a lot of our producers, they don't have the luxury to stop grazing in the late summer and let it get a good start. So then at this time of year, if there's plenty of growth out there, we can take some down, but we don't want to take it closer to the ground, we want to leave some growth out there to catch some snow, and to give it kind of an insulating effect, and so that it has a better chance of overwintering and coming back in the springtime.

Christa Hartsook 02:42
Absolutely. So we really need to be thinking a lot further ahead in our calendar here. Denise if we are wanting to really kind of stockpile that forage for fall.

Denise Schwab 02:52
Correct. Right. So we've got to be thinking about it through the summer months to get ready for fall.

Christa Hartsook 02:58
Yeah.

Denise Schwab 02:59
To do it the right way.

Christa Hartsook 03:00
To do it the right way. Yeah. So I know, Denise, that we obviously were really dry here in Iowa throughout the majority of this summer throughout the majority of Iowa. So I'm feeling like we probably have less of those reserves. I know there's a lot of guys out there who probably missed at least one cutting of hay and really feeling like they had enough regrowth there to take that cutting. So it seems like we're already a little short on that forage. If we're leaving cows out there and there, they are taking that to the ground, what does that really do? Long term.

Denise Schwab 03:35
So So I agree totally, we were short through the season, we've had a lot of folks that leave on pasture through this fall months. At this point, I don't know that we're doing a whole lot more damage, provided we leave a good I'll say four inch residue out there to catch that snow, because we kind of missed that prime opportunity to build reserves. So now we're just using it up. But where we're gonna see the big impact, I think will be in springtime. So those pastures if
we stay on them all winter, which some guys do or some guys have to where we see the impact is next spring, it's a lot slower to get started slower to come on. We have to feed more hay because we don't have grass coming. So at this point, I think when we get down to that four inch grass stubble, it probably the best thing is to pull them off the pastures, put them in the dry yard, have them in our wintering area or out in our corn stalks or wherever we have, but off pasture until next spring, when we get you know, probably six inches of growth and then we can start graze and again and it depends if we're talking about Bluegrass or brome grass or you know legumes in it but kind of in that four six inch range when we can kind of start grazing provided we have good growing conditions.

Christa Hartsook 04:56
Hopefully some more moisture.

Denise Schwab 04:57
Yes, yes.

Christa Hartsook 04:59
Is it too late now in the season needs to be fertilizing those pastures hoping that then we're kind of getting that boost going into spring next year.

Denise Schwab 05:08
Probably at this point because we're not getting a growth, you know, timing wise if we put phosphorus in. And now's a really good time to go out and get your soil test taken before snow flies. But hopefully after we get a little moisture back in the ground soon get a probe in the ground. But it's a good time to get a soil test taken. And so we can plan for next spring, the P and K, if we put it out there now, it's probably it's not going to do any good for this plant, because it's basically dormant right now winter dormancy. But it'll be there in the springtime, and it's not likely to move, I would not put any nitrogen out there now, because we're not going to have any growth, we're not going to benefit, we'll lose more than it's worth. So hold off on that nitrogen fertilizer until spring. When it comes to spring fertilizing, though there's kind of two different trains of thought. So one is in a condition like we're probably facing where we've been short on growth, the plants have been stressed, they're probably going to be a little slow to come on in the spring, some extra nitrogen in April, early May, when that plant starts to grow, is going to kind of help boost that early season yield. So there's a benefit to that. The other side of the thought process, though, is that in most years, assuming we get good spring rainfall and typical spring temperatures, we tend to have more early spring growth than our cows can utilize because it's growing faster than we can graze it. And so we have plenty of spring growth, but then we kind of run out early, early summer, mid summer. And so the other train of thought is don't put the nitrogen out there first thing in the spring, wait till maybe late May, early June, and then give it a shot at nitrogen, we're still cool, we're still getting good
growth, we typically still have moisture. So we'll get a flush of growth going into June, that kind of helps us carry into July. But our cows can better keep up with that spring grass, and not let it get ahead of us.

Christa Hartsook 07:06
That makes a lot of sense. Denise. We talked a little bit about how we are short on forage, and I think that's kind of widespread across Iowa. What do we need to think about in terms of our options, then there, we obviously know we're haying cows a lot sooner a lot longer. What does that look like for our producers?

Denise Schwab 07:24
For a lot of folks utilizing corn stalks is going to really help it. I think the first thing and maybe the most important thing is to go out right now and do an inventory. So what is our feed stuff available, how much get a handle on quality. So that might mean taking some hay probes and getting it tested for quality. If you’re going to only test one crop, I test your first cutting because that's half of our forage yield, typically. And it tends to be more variable depending on when we cut it. So if you're only going to invest in one invest in first cutting, but see what we've got available, put our rations together and figure out where we're at. Most guys are probably going to be close to having enough forage from what I'm hearing in the field. Definitely not necessarily a surplus, but should be okay. But now's the time to know if we are okay or not. Because we can always make corn stock bales right now. In fact, it's probably been very good weather to make stock bales dry. And so we've maintained our quality since we harvested. And we can use those particularly in second trimester. So for most folks, that's going to mean we're going to use corn stocks in our ration from now till about Christmas time. For our Spring calving herds, we can dilute down the decent quality hay we have, make it stretch a little farther give the cows a little bit of fill, but still meet their nutrient requirements. What we don't want to do is depend on corn stalks as their main source when we get out into late gestation early calving season, because it just doesn't have enough nutrient density there. So it's planning that process looking at what's available. Do we have enough and then staging our hay so we use our lower quality hay now? Our middle quality hay right after the first of the year, depending on weather, and we keep our best stuff for that calving season lactation?

Christa Hartsook 09:18
Absolutely. That was going to be a question that I had Denise was just you know, when you're using stock bales that you're just giving up that energy requirement, and as they move along in that gestation, obviously going to be requiring a lot more and you want them at their best condition going into the spring. So

Denise Schwab 09:34
and we can always supplement I mean, that's to me, I always say that's the beauty of the rumen is we can feed them just about anything. So whatever forage we have available to us we can supplement to meet that need. Now typically our supplementation is going to be corn for
energy and or silage, but a corn base and something like distillers grains or corn gluten feed is our protein source, which unfortunately is well fortunately unfortunately depends So what side of the stick you're on, but it's kind of high pricec. So we don't want to supplement any more than we absolutely have to. Because that high price.

Christa Hartsook  10:09
Absolutely. Denise, what other recommendations do you have for our producers out there looking to really capitalize as best they can on fall forages that are available.

Denise Schwab  10:19
So again, you know, we're kind of a little late because we should have been planning this earlier. But if you look around the countryside, those places that maybe chop corn or put some rye out right behind silage or early beans, that rye looks really good right now. And in a lot of cases, it's six to 10 inches tall, it's prime for grazing, we can graze that fairly short this winter. So that's a great opportunity. Had we thought far enough ahead that we have it, you know, otherwise, that's kind of our main flexibility or flexible option from a grazing standpoint, at this point, if we had some like summer annuals like sorghum, Sudan grass or Sudan grass available, that can easily be stockpiled going into fall and use that as fall winter grazing, but it had to be planted this summer. So that's an option looking ahead for another year as an additional forage for fall grazing.

Christa Hartsook  11:13
Are there other forages like that, that we should consider to Denise, if we're planning ahead for next year. You know, we know what our cool season grasses are that do really well in this spring. What do we need to think about if we wanted to really extend that season for cows.

Denise Schwab  11:28
So to me, we're going to look at a cool season winter annual like cereal rye to get us early spring growth, because that's going to be the first to break dormancy in the springtime, it's probably going to give us a good two to three weeks growth ahead of when our pastures start to come on. So that’ll give us an extra two to three weeks early in the spring, triticale is another option winter wheat is another option, they tend to be a little later breaking dormancy than rye. So if we really want to get that early spring jump, it's cereal rye to do that. And then we look at how do we extend that grazing in the fall well, summer or fall, because if we can get a little extra grazing through the summer months when our pastures are stressed the most, and let them have some time to rest and recuperate. That helps us in the fall. So that would be our summer annuals like sorghum, Sudan grass and grass, Pearl millet to really kind of helped fill that August timeframe. And the beauty of those is we can go in and graze them in August. And then let them rest and stockpile them and then have a large quantity of forage available for this time of year to help get us that extra grazing late in the season. So thinking about how we can can put those into the system. And you don't really need a lot of acres with that either. So the work we've done up at Northeast research farm at Nashua, we're seeing yields in the range
of two to four tons an acre of cereal rye. Now we're mechanically harvesting it because we don't have cows up there. But we can see that kind of tonnage early in the season. Our summer annuals, we're looking at somewhere between three and seven tons of dry matter yield on a two cutting system. So kind of that August cutting or grazing and then again, another one in the late fall time period. So you don't need a lot of acres. You know, when you're getting that kind of yield. That's almost as good as corn silage in terms of total tonnage. So, you know, couple acres of an annual like that go a long ways.

Christa Hartsook 13:29
Absolutely. Denise, what else do we need to be thinking about at this point in the season?

Denise Schwab 13:34
Well, you know, just kind of the general getting ready for fall and winter kind of things. I'm afraid winter will be here soon.

Christa Hartsook 13:40
So sir, let

Denise Schwab 13:41
me know. If we've got water lines that are above ground out in the pastures we want to get those blown out before we get any colder. We want to make sure our water systems for the wintertime are up and running. Remember, if you've got electricity and water, you have the risk of shorts, so make sure you're not having to shorten your water tank. The cows will tell you because they'll stand there wanting to drink and scared to death to put their nose in the water. Yep. So keep an eye on that. Get her windbreaks built now. So corn stock bales we talked earlier. There's a lot of stock bales getting made. They make great windbreaks get them up now before the wind starts to blow any harder. So they're in place to give us some protection, make sure we've got our bedding source moved up close to the building site, just some of those kinds of things I think is a good idea to get done. And since we've been a little dry, it's a great time to do some pen maintenance on yard. So if we've got former mud holes now just dry holes, that former mud holes or places we need to build up some mounts. It's good time to get some lines in and build those mounds that bring some dirt back up if we need to get that all done before we go into wintertime as well.

Christa Hartsook 14:48
Yeah, great ideas and great ongoing maintenance that we can always all do.

Denise Schwab 14:48

Oh yep.

Christa Hartsook 14:49
Denise, we appreciate your time today. Thanks so much for being on.

Denise Schwab 14:57
Thank you for having me.

Christa Hartsook 14:59
Other resources In case we want to send producer somewhere, where can I send them?

Denise Schwab 15:03
Sure, our best option is go to the Iowa Beef Center dot org, that's our homepage. It's got all of our resources on it. We've got it divided up into topics. So go into the resource page there. Or if you need to reach one of your field specialists, we're under the who we are tab and you can find all of us in our contact information there as well.

Christa Hartsook 15:21
Awesome, Denise, thanks so much. We appreciate it.

Denise Schwab 15:24
Thank you.

Small Farms 15:25
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