

How Soon Can I Grow More Forage?

The season of 2011 drastically reduced the forage supply. The shortage will rebound, impacting the forage supplies of 2012 and beyond. Here are steps you can take to quickly get more forage on the acres you work, starting with the earliest return of forage:

➤ **Nitrogen on >50% grass fields** – Applying 75–80 lbs of nitrogen (plus sulfur – 40-0-0-4S - if no manure the past year) can easily double the first cutting yield off of these traditionally, marginally managed fields.

Harvested 7-10 days earlier than alfalfa, these fields can yield forage to support the highest levels of milk production and protein to [help] reduce soy cost.

➤ **Oats with new seedings** – An old practice, oats planted with the legume seeding and harvested at flag leaf stage, will give several tons of very high quality forage by mid-late June. Allowed to go to early soft dough, it will produce excellent forage for heifers, or if no manure was used, for dry cows.

➤ **Winter grains as forage** – An increasing number of farms last fall grew winter forage, especially triticale. Applying nitrogen and harvesting at flag leaf stage, can give 8 silage tons/acre of high quality forage at the same time as early grass. A short-season, high energy forage crop can be grown immediately after it. And a similar double-crop option can be used for fields of run out hay crop. Apply nitrogen and take an early hay crop... follow with short-season energy forage.

Short season energy forages can be short-season corn, the new short season BMR sorghums, BMR Sorghum-Sudans, BMR Sudangrass or teff. Both teff and the sorghums require warm soils and warm weather for successful stand establishment and growth. They are not a cool season crop.

➤ **Teff** – will produce a cutting 47 days after planting. Requiring only 50 lbs of nitrogen/cutting, it produces forages equal to high quality cool-season grasses. A critical step is to move the cutter bar up to 3–4 inches, since the next cutting has to be grown from the remaining leaf tissue. Using this system, 2.75 tons of dry matter has been produced in as short as 17 days after the first cutting.

➤ **BMR6 Sudangrass** – is the next earliest forage supply, at 45 days. BMR Sudangrass is faster emerging, and higher quality than Sorghum-Sudangrasses and yields just as much. The smaller stem makes it **easier to dry**. Both Sudangrass and Sorghum-Sudangrass work well in rotational grazing. The down side is the new BMR6 Sudangrass seed is in limited supply.

➤ **BMR6 Sorghum-Sudan** is a taller species, with first harvest in the middle of July. Sorghum-Sudan is only for managers who pay attention to details. It needs to be harvested at about 3 feet in height. Taller crops

maintain quality, with a dramatic increase in dry matter yield and amount of water to remove. This crop grows 3 inches/day, thus the necessity of watching it closely. Higher cutting height will speed re-growth of Sorghum-Sudan. Intermeshing rollers are far superior to flails in drying this crop for silage. It produces 2–3 cuts/year. Harvested correctly, research conducted at the Miner Institute has found it can produce the same amount of milk as good quality corn silage in a high forage diet.

➤ **Short-season corn (< 85 day) planted as the first corn in the spring** – barring any prolonged dry spell or excessive cloudy weather that delays maturity, it produces mature corn silage by the beginning of August. Short-season corn produces a shorter plant with less potential silage yield. Much of the yield loss can be offset by *planting at much higher plant populations* (i.e. 40,000 plants/acre produced 19.6 tons/acre in 2011). A major concern is that many short-season corns are bred from flint-type endosperm. This produces very hard kernels that may forage-test well, but a significant portion of the energy may end as undigested in the manure. This can be offset by planting short season varieties that have flourey or soft endosperm. Thus, whether processed or not, the cows will get a greater portion of the energy the grain contains. If the harvest is early enough, a fall crop of spring oats could be sequentially grown.

➤ A potential new crop is **83 day BMR dwarf sorghum** – It only requires one cutting and harvested at soft dough, can be direct-chopped without the necessity of drying like Sorghum-Sudan. Note: This is not a crop for cool seasons. Sorghum likes heat. It is critical that your drill or corn planter be able to plant only 8–10 lbs of seed/acre. Higher populations, like excessive high populations in corn, will lodge. More research on this crop is being conducted at the Cornell Valatie Research farm. Get experience with a small plot of this crop before expanding planting on the farm.

➤ **Double crop winter forage** – All of the above high-energy crops can be planted after harvesting winter forage such as triticale. They can then allow subsequent winter forage to be planted again after the short-season energy crop, continuing the high yield rotation.

Watch for more information in our next issue.

(Edited from an article by Tom Kilcer, Advanced Ag Systems Crop News, January 2012)

Interested in discussing topics in this newsletter, or want to do a better job feeding and managing your cows? Call me! From calves to heifers, dry and lactating cows, my goal is to help you. That's Renaissance's commitment!

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THE TEAM FOR RESULTS
SOLUTIONS FOR SUCCESS!

Movin' Forward

What are your plans for 2012? Do you operate your farm with a sense of determination and direction... goals and targets, areas of necessary change, challenges to meet, addressing priorities to better meet your needs and those of your livestock? You are a valuable member of the local and national economy, which makes it all the more important to define your anticipations for the rest of this year. I'd be happy to work with you in this process, setting short-term and long-range goals, and helping to figure ways that these can be accomplished in a timely fashion.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank you for your business and the privilege of working hand-in-hand with you... a member of your team! I am committed to "movin' forward in 2012"... making things better on your farm!

COMMITTED to SOLUTION for SUCCESS!

IT MAY BE WINTER NOW, BUT ...

Yes, it is still winter according to the calendar! But we know that spring and then summer will follow. While you may be more concerned at this time with shoveling snow or thawing pipes, it is really a good time to start thinking (and rethinking) the consequences of summer heat and humidity, along with the immediate and long-term impact it can have on your livestock.

Looking ahead, there is no way we can accurately predict the weather. Last summer saw record high temperatures and severe drought conditions in many locations. Of course... time will tell. Regardless, it helps to be prepared, whether or not we experience record-breaking heat or cooler than normal temperatures. Hot and humid weather will inevitably take a toll on the health and productivity of your livestock. What about fans or a sprinkler system(s) you've considered in the past and have not yet installed? Is there sufficient water in your barn and travel lanes to accommodate the volume of cows you have? What about heat abatement strategies for calves, heifers and dry cows? Be proactive and develop plans to help deal with heat and humidity before it happens ~ and to safeguard your livestock from the impact these can have on their productivity and your profitability.



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February 2012...

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Movin' Forward

CHECK IT OUT!

