

Grazing Bites

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I believe I've already had enough winter, but looking at the long term forecast I guess I better just get used to it for a while. Of course, it is Indiana weather, so they could be wrong! It is a new year, and I will be optimistic that 2014 is going to be a good one. The livestock don't seem too concerned about what year it is and just chew their cud and ruminate over greener days ahead.

Whether you are grazing stockpiled forages, feeding hay or other feed, some winter days are more challenging than others for both the producer and the livestock. I'm sure the livestock might think that this forage or feed stuff with frost, snow, ice or combination, would have been nice a few days last August instead of now. It always surprises me though how snow is usually no issue for them. If the quality of the stockpiled forage is good, then they will go after it...even if hay is provided. The quality of good stockpiled forage can easily be better than hay. Too much hay is still cut and baled for yield, not quality. Given a choice, the livestock will choose the better of the two.

Ice, or enough ice to prevent grazing, is probably the number one reason to pull up stakes and move to some hay or other feed. Deep snow is next. How deep is too deep? That depends on two things, the livestock grazing it and the amount of forage present. Experienced animals, those that have done it before, won't even hesitate; they know where dinner is and go after it. If you watch the younger, less experienced animals, they tend to eat first where others have been eating and then they soon figure it all out. Smaller ruminants, especially sheep, tend to have less issue with snow and are quite good at digging it out with their hooves. I've observed deer doing the same thing; they also are quite good in digging up turnip bulbs out of frozen ground. The amount of forage present becomes more critical as the amount of snow increases; the more forage present, the easier it is to get to.

The quality of that stockpiled forage must be good; if anything, energy is usually the shortfall, protein second, if too much mature forage is included. Energy can be a challenge. Growing and lactating animals may need supplementation. Winter annuals such as brassicas (turnips, kale), and cereal grains will do a better job of maintaining enough energy and protein for those animals needing more.

Most producers are feeding hay or other feed by this time of year and there is certainly nothing wrong with that. There are on the other hand, producers that want to reduce the amount of fed products and would rather move temporary fences than get a tractor out. Remember everyone still needs a contingency plan!

Weather can surprise us, even with the best of planning, and quickly force you into plan B...or C. You don't want to find yourself unprepared and I've found that it is just best to be ready and prepared for short notice too. Stationing large round bales of hay in good locations, is a good way to do this; ideally, a location close to where you are grazing (could even be a portion of that field), especially an area that could benefit from added nutrients and or organic matter. I would also recommend if possible, that they have some wind protection. This hay can be set out quite a bit in advance and ready to be used when needed. Bales should be set out in such a pattern where you can easily allocate them as needed by

simply moving a temporary fence. This type of system puts nutrients back where they are needed and is nothing permanent.

Permanent winter feeding areas should ideally be in an area with some wind break, a good winter watering source, on a well-drained soil/site, and where runoff and manure/waste feed can be managed. This means away from water bodies or with adequate buffers and usually with rock or concrete pads to feed on. Mud, along with wet cold weather, really increases energy needs. For the pocketbook, the producer, and livestock, good feeding or grazing conditions are ideal. Muddy, stressful conditions should be avoided when possible. Feeding on rock padded areas or grazing sufficiently heavy stands of stockpiled forage usually are adequate.

We are just weeks away from Indiana's two grazing conferences. Both conferences will have outstanding speakers and I would strongly encourage you to attend either or both. The planning committees have worked hard to get outstanding speakers and keep the costs low. Each conference has its own agenda with different speakers so there will be no duplication if you can attend more than one. Also, the *Heart of America Grazing Conference* is here in Indiana later this month.

Keep on grazing!

Reminders & Opportunities

American Forage & Grassland Council Conference – January 12-14, 2014, Memphis, TN; for more information go to: <http://www.afgc.org/>

Heart of America Grazing Conference – January 20-21, 2014, Columbus, IN; for more information go to <https://ag.purdue.edu/agry/extension/Pages/grazing.asp>



Southern Indiana Grazing Conference – February 5th, 2014, Odon, IN – Jim Gerrish and Kathy Voth are main speakers. For more information contact the Daviess County Soil and Water Conservation office at 812-254-



4780, Extension 3, email Toni Allison at dcsxcd@rtccom.net, or visit their website at http://daviesscoswcd.org/main/page_sigc.html or <https://www.facebook.com/SouthernIndianaGrazingConference>

Northern Indiana Grazing Conference – February 7-8, 2014 - Michiana Event Center, Howe, IN. For more information contact the LaGrange County Soil and Water Conservation office at 260-463-3471, Ext. 3 or visit their website at <http://www.lagrangeswcd.org>.

Livestock Forage and Grain Forum – March 13, 2014 – Marriott Hotel in downtown Indianapolis, IN. For more information go to: <http://www.indianasoybean.com/events-and-promotions/livestock-forage-and-grain-forum>



As of September 7, 2013, the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) is now the National Grazing Lands Coalition (GLC).