APRIL 2025



NEWSLETTER AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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A Word from the Agent . . .



Spring is here and things are definitely starting to become busy on the farm. Remember to start preparing your field equipment for planting and harvesting, plan out weed control measures, check bulls for breeding season and overall be

safe. It is easy for us to become overwhelmed with everything that needs done, but please take time to be safe out on the farm. Also, ticks are still out in the fields, so treat your clothes and check for ticks. Ticks have become a problem here and the diseases associated with ticks are no joke. We are still taking soil samples here at the office, but expect about a two week delay at a minimum. There is a lot I could go on and on about but overall, enjoy this spring weather and get outside!

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Informed

Forage Management Tips for April

- Sign up for an April KY Grazing or Fencing School.
- Graze winter annuals that were seeded last fall.
- Graze cover crops using temporary fencing.
- As pasture growth begins, rotate through pastures quickly to keep up with the fast growth of spring.
- Creep-graze calves and lambs, allowing them access to highest quality pasture.
- Finish re-seeding winter feeding sites where soil disturbance and sod damage occurred.
- As pasture growth exceeds the needs of the livestock, remove some fields from the rotation and allow growth to accumulate for hay or haylage.
- Determine need for supplemental warm season forages such as pearl millet or sudangrass. Wait till May to plant though.
- Flash graze pastures



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Lexington, KY 40506



In March and April grass growth in the Commonwealth's pastures goes from 0 to 60 mph in just a few short weeks. We often find ourselves impatiently waiting for grass to start growing and then just a few short weeks later wondering what we are going to do with it all! The following suggestions can help you to optimize spring grass growth and utilization.

- **Implement rotational grazing.** To fully utilize the spring flush of pasture growth <u>YOU</u> must be in control of grazing. In a continuous grazing system, the cows are in charge. By utilizing rotational stocking, you start to make the decisions. Implementing a rotational stocking system may be as simple as closing some gates or stringing up some polywire.
- **Feed a little hay in late winter and early spring.** It is tempting to just let cattle roam and pick pastures for early grass growth, but this can set pastures back and reduce overall dry matter production. It is important to restrict cattle to one area, feed a little hay, and allow pastures to accumulate 4 to 5" of growth before starting to graze.
- **Start grazing at 4 to 5" of growth.** Another common mistake that graziers make is waiting too long to start grazing. If you wait until the first paddock is ready to graze, 8-10" of growth, by the time you reach the last paddock it will be out of control. Starting a little bit early allows you to establish a "grazing wedge" (Figure 1).
- **Rotate animals rapidly.** It is important to realize that grazing pastures closely and repeatedly as they initiate growth in early spring can reduce production for the entire season. Therefore, it is important to keep animals moving rapidly through the system. The general rule is that if grass is growing rapidly then your rotation should be rapid. This will allow you to stay ahead of the grass by topping it off and keeping it in a vegetative state.
- **Do not apply spring nitrogen.** Applying nitrogen in the spring will make the problem of too much grass at once even worse. In many cases you are better off applying nitrogen in late summer or early fall to stimulate growth for winter stockpiling.
- **Remove most productive paddocks from rotation and harvest for hay.** Graze all paddocks until the pasture growth is just about to get away from you and then remove those productive paddocks from your rotation and allow them to accumulate growth for hay or baleage harvest.
- **Increase stocking rate in the spring.** An alternative to harvesting excess forage as hay or baleage is to increase your stocking rate by adding more animal units in the spring and then decreasing animal numbers as plant growth slows due to higher temperature during the summer months. While this is a viable approach, it is not practical on smaller or part-time operations.
- **Even out seasonal distribution of forage by adding warm-season grasses.** Adding a well-adapted warm-season grass that produces most of its growth in July and August would allow you to concentrate grazing on your cool-season paddocks during periods of rapid growth (spring flush). After cool-season grass growth slows in late spring and early summer, animals can be shifted in the warm-season paddocks for summer grazing.
- **Bush-hog out of control pastures.** The benefits of clipping include maintaining pastures in a vegetative state, encouraging regrowth, and controlling weeds. Clipping pastures costs money, so make sure that the primary reason for bush-hogging is pasture management, not aesthetics.
- **Stockpile out of control pastures for summer grazing.** Although forage quality decreases as the plant matures, the quality of spring stockpiled pasture is sufficient for dry cows and in some cases can result in reasonable gains on growing animals during the summer months. This is especially true if using novel endophyte tall fescue and the pastures were clipped at the early boot stage to promote vegetive regrowth. This could be a cost-effective and simple way to provide additional grazing during the summer months.

Managing spring grass can be challenging. It is important to find that "sweet spot" for starting to graze, not too early and not too late! Hopefully one or more of the above tips will help you optimize your spring grass!

Cooperative Extension Service



At The Jones Farm 10 Prewitt Lane. Winchester, KY APRIL 30TH, 2025 AT 5:30PM

TOPICS COVERED

 FORAGE ESTABLISHMENT TECHNIQUES
NO-TILL DRILL SETUP
FORAGE EVALUATION

MEAL PROVIDED!

REGISTER BY CALLING: (859) 744-4682

MORE CONTACT INFO: levi.berg@uky.edu

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH





Clark County



Cattlemen's

2025 SPRING FIELD DAY

May 6th, 2025 at 6:00pm at Solid Rock Angus (2661 Clintonville Rd. Winchester, KY)

Talks and business session will start after meal. There will be a vote on bylaws changes for the number of directors. Information about the bylaws vote is available by contacting Ethan Taulbee (859) 749-8700.

A Meal Will Be Provided and Membership Dues Can Be Paid On Site

RSVP By Calling the Clark County Extension Office (859) 744-4682



The Clark County Cattlemen's has partnered with the Clark County Southern States Co-op on a Mineral Program.

Each Clark County Cattlemen's member can buy up to 40 bags of mineral and get \$2.50 back per bag. This program will run **April 7** thru **April 21**. (*Does NOT include white salt*).



That First Calf Heifer is not a Mature Cow — So why would we treat her like one?

By: Dr. Katie VanValin, Assistant Extension Professor, University of Kentucky

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Figure 1: Nutrient partitioning for heifers and cows.

Developing and first calf heifers are not the same as mature cows. While that seems like an obvious statement, there is still a common belief that heifers should be able to "get by" under the same management as mature cows. The thought is that we are selecting heifers that match available resources when we should be selecting heifers that *will become* cows that match our resources. Because heifers still have additional nutrient requirements for growth, they require different nutritional management than cows.

In the beef industry we talk about selecting "heiferacceptable" bulls all the time, because we understand the need for emphasis on calving ease in heifers compared to mature cows. If we are going to keep back our own replacements or develop heifers, we also need to think about selecting a heifer acceptable feeding program.

Decades of research have helped us understand how heifers and cows prioritize nutrients (figure 1). The first priority is meeting maintenance requirements—these are the nutrients needed to keep the animal alive and maintaining their current body condition. Next up is supporting lactation, followed by growth (for growing females), supporting an existing pregnancy, and lastly the estrous cycle or the ability to breed back.

First-calf heifers are particularly vulnerable in a cowcalf operation. They must do everything a mature cow does— raise a calf and breed back—while also continuing to grow. The consequence of not meeting her nutrient requirements is the inability to breed back, often resulting in young females being culled from the herd. Developing heifers is a significant investment, with costs spread over the animal's productive lifetime. Research has shown that it takes at least 4-5 years for a heifer to pay for herself. When first-calf heifers fail to breed back and are culled, it almost always results in a net loss to the operation. Not only have we failed to recoup her development costs, but we've also lost out on potential income from her future calves.

Reproductive failure in these young females is often wrongly blamed on genetics, but we know reproductive traits are lowly heritable. The real blame is likely due to nutrition, or more specifically undernutrition. The good news is that nutrition is something we can manage and control. Young growing females are smaller than their mature cow counterparts which means that their feed intake will be less than that of the mature cow. With less feed intake, this means that heifers require diets with greater concentrations of energy and protein.

In a typical spring calving system, the herd will likely be consuming lush forages during the breeding season but looking at the critical time leading up to breeding season, most herds will be consuming conserved forages. When thinking about supplementing average quality cools season grass hay, a lactating cow may require 3 lbs. of dried distillers grains, whereas a heifer consuming this same hay would require 5 lbs. of dried distillers grains.

To ensure that heifers are meeting their nutrient requirements, consider managing these young females in a separate group from the rest of the cow herd. For smaller herds, it may also make sense to manage any mature cows that have a low body condition score with these young females. This can allow for strategic supplementation for cattle needing extra nutrition without overfeeding mature cows that are in good body condition.

Always test your hay, and consider feeding higher quality forages to heifers, which can reduce supplemental feed costs. Another benefit to hay testing is the ability to select supplemental feeds that provide the best value based on the amount of supplemental energy or protein required by the herd. Energy is often the most limiting ingredient in foragebased systems, and it is highly unlikely that average quality grass hay is going to be an adequate source of energy for developing heifers, lactating first-calf heifers, or even lactating mature cows. Careful consideration should be made to provide adequate energy as well as protein in the diet.

At the end of the day, it is important to remember that developing and first-calf heifers are simply not the same as the mature cows in the herd. Take care to manage these animals to set them up for longterm success and longevity in the herd.

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Special Announcement

By: Will Snell, UK Agriculture Economics

Late last year, Congress passed the American Relief Act of 2025 which (among other items) authorized \$10 billion of economic assistance to U.S. farmers due to depressed crop prices and slumping farm income USDA has already opened applications for the **Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP)** which will run through August 15, 2025. Payments are made for 22 different crops with rates being \$42.91/ acre for corn, \$30.69/acre for wheat and \$29.76/acre for soybeans. Double crop producers eligible for dual payments.

ECAP payments will be based upon 2024 eligible/reported planted (not base) acres times the 85 percent of the payment rate to ensure total national program payments, FSA may eventually issue a second payment to fulfill the \$10 billion funding. Pre-filled ECAP applications will be mailed to all eligible producers. After verifying and completing For m FSA-63 ECAP producers should submit their application to their local FSA county office either in-person, electronically, via fax, or online. Based on 2024 planted acres, Kentucky farmers will be eligible for around \$135 million based upon 100% of our planted acres and full payment rates. Full program details from USDA can be found at:

Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP) | Farm Service Agency

with an excellent summary available from Farmdoc (University of Illinois) at:

The 2025 Emergency Commodity Assistance Program - farmdoc daily









Confetti Chicken Quesadillas

1 small green bell pepper, seeded and diced 1 small red bell pepper, seeded and diced 1 tablespoon hot pepper, minced (optional) 1 pound skinless, boneless chicken breast, diced 1 (1 ounce) packet fajita seasoning mix 1 tablespoon olive oil 10 (10 inch) wholewheat tortillas 1 (8 ounce) package reduced fat cheddar cheese, shredded

Preheat the broiler and prepare baking sheet with non-stick spray. Toss the diced chicken with the fajita seasoning and place on the baking sheet. Spread chopped peppers on baking sheet. Place under the broiler and broil until the chicken pieces are thoroughly cooked and no longer pink in the center, about 10 minutes. Brush skillet with oil and heat to medium. Place one tortilla in skillet. Layer half of tortilla with approximately one-third cup chicken



and pepper mixture. **Sprinkle** with 3 tablespoons cheddar cheese. **Fold** over and flip tortilla to crisp other side. Repeat until all quesadillas have been prepared. **Cut** each quesadilla into wedges and serve with salsa, if desired.

Yield: 10 servings

Nutritional Analysis: 270 calories, 10 g fat, 3 g saturated fat, 40 mg cholesterol, 880 mg sodium, 2 g sugar, 23 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 19 g protein

Buying Kentucky Proud is easy. Look for the label at your grocery store, farmers' market, or roadside stand.