

# Grazing Bites

July 2017

Victor Shelton, NRCS State Agronomist/Grazing Specialist

July 4<sup>th</sup> usually reminds me that half of the growing season is pretty much gone. After panicking for a moment or two, it is best to just come to the conclusion that everything is done that needs to be done, and if not, perhaps it just wasn't that important. I long for those July 4<sup>th</sup> holidays in the past that were huge family get-to-gathers, those out-of-the back of the vehicles while putting nitrogen on knee high corn in the river bottoms or the leisurely porch gatherings eating watermelon and blackberry pie. I'm not sure why all of a sudden everyone seems so busy, and there is just never enough time.

By now, most have made the decision on whether to clip pastures or not. Like I said before, clipping just for aesthetics is hard to justify. Saving energy where possible is also beneficial on the pocket book. If the pasture has been grazed once or twice already then it probably really does not have that many seed heads present, and depending on how it was grazed, perhaps not many weeds either. If you look at the field from a "windshield" point of view, it is usually going to appear to have a lot more seed heads than it really does. Now, if for some reason it has not been grazed much, or not at all this year, then I would expect it to have quite a bit of seed heads by now and quickly maturing. That is not always the case though; stressed plants generally produce more seed. So it's worth a closer look before clipping.

Another reason I would have a hard time justifying clipping just for aesthetics is the possibility of a pink eye problem. The seed heads do not cause pink eye, or at least not independently. The seed heads along with other things present irritate the eyes. Watery eyes draw flies. The flies then move the bacteria from the infected animal to other animals.

Dr. Bill Shulaw, OSU extension veterinarian, once wrote, "*Pinkeye demonstrates a well-known principle in infectious diseases. Disease usually occurs only when there is a susceptible host (in this case a non-immune cow), an infectious agent (Moraxella bovis for pinkeye), and environmental conditions that favor infection of the host (irritation of the eye to create tears that attract the flies and that favor the attachment of the bacteria to eye tissues). Infectious agents involved in many diseases are relatively common in most cattle herds, but disease isn't usually observed until the other two criteria are present. The disease often disappears from a herd after a couple of grazing seasons without any special preventive efforts like vaccination or pasture clipping. Pinkeye, as it is usually named and defined in textbooks, is caused by a bacterial infection of the surface of the eyeball and the inner surfaces of the lids. Unfortunately, the bacteria that cause this disease are commonly carried by a few animals that show no signs of disease and serve to introduce it to a new herd when those animals are added to it or that keep the bacteria on the farm to expose a new group of susceptible animals to it. Most animals that recover from the disease clear the infection from their eye tissues; sometimes all of them do. The body's immune response is responsible for this and serves to help keep the animal from getting it again. This is why sometimes it appears in a cow herd with both cows and calves affected by it, but it eventually disappears by the end of the summer. If one or more carriers remain, it sometimes appears again the next year but usually only in the animals that weren't affected the previous year such as new calves or heifers housed at another location the previous year.*" If you knew which cow(s) might be the silent carriers, they could grow some wheels. That's probably enough on that topic.

Clipping during that second scenario above because it has more seed heads, is more justifiable, but even then there are other options, such as mowing for hay, though quality is going to be lower than it would have been earlier, but, counter-productive if you are trying to build fertility.

Instead I would recommend doing some high-density, short-duration grazing, or “mob” grazing. Allocate just enough forage for one day or less. The higher the density, the shorter the duration, and the longer the rest needed before it can be grazed again. The cattle consume the best of the forages and hammer the rest into the ground...along with well-distributed manure and urine creating a biological powerhouse that can push the envelope for a micro-flora environment. This type of grazing, with time, transforms the area with a flush of nutrients, microbial nitrogen, increased organic matter and diversity...it turns green!

If weeds are really the problem or at least appear to be a problem, then you need to make a decision – mow, spray or graze. Mowing certainly usually makes the field “look” better, but it may or may not control the weeds. Mowing in a timely manner can keep the weeds from spreading more seed and that is probably the biggest benefit of mowing. Shrubby pests such as blackberries may make good pies, but they can quickly turn into major thorns in a pasture and like most weeds rob sunlight and nutrients from the forages you are trying to grow. Noxious weeds and large populations of perennial weeds that are competing too much may require chemical control. Applying these herbicides at a time when they will be most likely be transferred to the roots is ideal and for most perennials should be later in the season when the plant is moving nutrients downward for winter storage. It is always better to spot spray or use a “wipe” type of system over blanket coverage. Broadleaf herbicides are also hard on the valuable legumes and beneficial forbs. Sheep or goats can help reduce weed pressures on pastures and can be rotated behind or in front of the cows depending on who needs the highest nutrition.



*Blackberries may taste good in pies, but don't make good pasture!*

Keep in mind that almost anything the livestock can do for you will be cheaper than anything you can do yourself, especially if a wheel is turning.

Keep on grazing!

### **Reminders & Opportunities**

**Indiana Forage Council Tour** – July 25, 2017 – South Central Indiana, for more information see attached flier. **Preregistration required, limited bus space.**

**Grazing for the Future Conference** – August 17-18, 2017, Madison, Indiana. Registration Link: <https://grazing-conference.eventbrite.com>

**The Indiana State Fair**, August 4<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>. The “Wonderful World of Food” is this year’s theme. Visit us at the “Pathway to Water Quality” and help us celebrate 25 years this year. <http://icp.iaswcd.org/outreach/pathway-to-water-quality-2/>  
<http://www.in.gov/statefair/fair/index.html>

More pasture information and past issues of Grazing Bites are available at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/technical/landuse/pasture/>