Looking Ahead to the Grazing Season

According to KSU Range Scientist Dr. Keith Harmoney the old ‘take half and leave half’ rule of grazing management ‘is probably the most common and most important rule of thumb for rangeland managers to follow’. What does it really mean, though?

Years of grazing studies have shown that animal performance and vegetative production are both at near optimal levels when grazing removes approximately 50 percent of the growing season’s top growth. This is also the level of removal that can be sustained over long periods of time without causing detrimental animal or forage production issues. At this level, the animal is using 25 percent, with the other 25 percent disappearing as a consequence of trampling, weathering, etc…

What about the other 50 percent? That’s the half that helps the stand remain sustainable. The remaining leaves are used for photosynthesis, resulting in new leaf material, increased root growth, and storage of carbohydrates for the dormant season so grasses kicked off the next growing season. Leave less than 50 percent, and you may well sacrifice the ability of the plant to fully ‘recover’ as needed for long term sustainability of the stand.

Don’t think you can make the enterprise cash flow without making money? Research also shows that overgrazed pastures tend to produce lower net returns than pastures that are stocked at a moderate rate using the take half and leave half concept. It might seem like you are gaining some value from increased stocking rates on the front end, but the result is often a reduction in quality and quantity over time that isn’t sustainable.

We’re not to turn out yet. Now is a great time to take one last look at stocking rates and even ‘emergency’ grazing management plans so adjustments can be made that results in long term forage stand health as opposed short term.

Leaching Houseplants

Have you ever thought about the water your houseplants are growing in? It might not be as great for them as you think.

Consider this: we like houseplants to grow well so we add fertilizer. Fertilizers are salts that build up in soil over time. That build-up can harm plant roots, leading to scorched leaves and unhealthy plants. It tends to be worst in houseplants because they are grown in containers without that prevent roots from exploring additional soil area while holding fertilizers in that same limited area. Add in slower growth as a result of low light conditions in winter, and you can see real problems.

The solution to excessive houseplant salts is leaching. Leaching is the process of adding enough water to wash out excess salts. Simply take plants outside or put them in a bathtub or sink and then (slowly – so you don’t overflow the rim of the pot) add the amount of water that would equal twice the volume of the pot. This will help push salts through the soil medium.

If salt has formed a crust on the soil surface soil, remove it, just don’t take more than one-quarter of an inch of the underlying media. It might be a good time to consider repotting as well.