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Summer Monitoring

The start of the growing season can be an exciting time. Grass greens up. We might be getting ready to put cattle out on grass or are looking ahead to haying season.

Mid-summer is sometimes a different story. It's hot. Ticks attack from below and mosquitos from above. Regularly checking pastures might get replaced with the busyness of haying. After haying, the busyness of hauling water or moving livestock to other grass means we don't return to those hayfields like we did earlier. Most of the time, it all balances out and we're just fine, but sometimes, it's good to be a little more deliberate about monitoring.

When you're chasing weeds in the pasture, take a yard stick and do some random checks of grass height. It's easy to 'guess' how much grass might be left out there, but actually measuring may tell us a different story. It may mean we have to make decisions about rotations or supplementation earlier – but it may mean a better stand in the long term.

A look now and again at hay fields post-harvest isn't a bad thing, either. When we remove almost the entirety of the plant during harvest operations, we force root reserves to push out new growth. Regular visits may only tell us what we don't want to hear: that drought conditions are worse than we thought and recovery hasn't happened as quickly as we'd like. It can also allow us to catch issues like fall armyworm feeding or lack of recovery in thinner soils that we can do something about.

June 18-24 is National Forage Week, and might be a good time to start that more deliberate monitoring. It doesn't have to be much, but regular scouting can help you make decisions in the short term that you'll reap the benefits from for years to come.

Tree Health Evaluation

It's been a tough few years for our trees. We're seeing it in thinning canopies after leaf out this spring or in some cases issues where trees didn't leaf out at all.

Why did they go backwards? There are lots of reasons, and most decline isn't attributed to just one. A tree can handle one dry spell pretty well. It can handle drought plus a spring disease okay. Start getting two or three dry years plus disease plus a defoliating insect, etc..., and problems start to occur. That's when characteristics like those above start to show.

Monitor trees by observing exposed (not shaded) branch tips. If less than four inches of growth is seen over the previous year, the tree may be under stress and susceptible to decline.

Not sure what new growth looks like? Color is the key. New twigs emerging from the bud may be greener with brighter colored leaves. Leaves will be attached directly to new stems rather than lateral branches and look more compressed than growth from previous years.

If the tree is unhealthy, determine why. It might be a mechanical injury or sunscald. If compounding stressors are a factor, consider how to alleviate them. For example, trees need to receive water to a depth of 12 inches every couple of weeks during summer – via rainfall or supplemental watering. Planning now for supplemental watering or winter protection or disease/insect management can save you valuable time – and a valuable tree – later.