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Can We Expect Much More?

While I wouldn't say it's uncommon to see brome grass heading in early May, I also wouldn't say it's ideal. Our weather roller coaster: warm and dry early, then a cold snap, and now moisture with cooler temperatures have kind of 'piled on' already stressed brome stands, with at least some stands exhibiting the beginning of heading – without attaining much height. That push to reproduction without much biomass could be a concern in some fields.

Grass tillers begin growth with their growing point developing from a dormant bud at or below ground level. As long as that growing point remains close to the ground and growth remains vegetative (not grazed too short/harvested and no stems are produced), the plant continues to produce leaves. On the other hand, if that tiller is triggered to elevate or enter reproduction, not only is the growing point exposed to potential removal by grazing, but once we get seedheads, production of vegetative tillers will be considerably reduced. Biomass accumulation at this point begins to flatten and plant height comes predominantly from stem elongation, a few tillers, and seedhead emergence.

What's that mean for grass production this year? In stands where growth is still vegetative, leaf number might still be on the increase, and we could continue to accumulate biomass. For those beginning to elongate and put up a seedhead, however, any increase in production is going to have to come from basal regrowth, which will be at least somewhat dependent on a combination of temperatures remaining cool and ample root/crown energy reserves required to send out new growth.

Bottom line: some of our cool season grass plants have already maximized leafy biomass production and it's unlikely we'll get a lot more from them until fall. Scout fields now to stay ahead of grazing pressure – and so you aren't surprised at harvest.