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## Out to Grass

I recently enjoyed taking some days off to spend with my family. We took a little trip to Hamilton Missouri to see the Missouri Star Quilting shops. While I'm not a quilter, I am a fan! So taking in all of the quilting shops was a lot of fun, and a bit overwhelming. Since this is a destination spot for quilters from all over, it was amusing that they provide a lounge. This lounge was equipped with leather recliners, big screen televisions and pool tables. This quilting company has taken over the small downtown and it is quite the tourist attraction.

While my sister was here from Connecticut, we got her involved in sorting some cattle. My family was snickering about having Auntie, help them. I told them that she was my dad's right hand gal, I built her up so big, she offered to castrate some calves using her bare hands and teeth!

I see some cattle moving out to grass, I understand that hay supplies are low, but so is the grass! We need some rain and some warmth, to bring on the grass. Every year at green up, grass managers must make decisions about when and where to begin grazing. Considerations include hay reserves, the cost of purchasing additional feed, and the impact of early grazing on pasture grasses. How long should you continue to feed stored forages, to delay the impact of grazing on pastures? How early can you turn out, relieving the cost of feeding? Which pasture do you graze first? The answer to these questions is: It depends! You may have several options, depending on your pasture resources, your stored feed resources, and your ability to be flexible in your grazing options.

You might want to feed your livestock a few weeks longer. If you have the feed reserves available, feeding livestock a little later into spring provides your pasture grasses with time to shift from dependency on reserves to utilizing photosynthesis for energy. If grazing is initiated too early, production for the balance of the growing season can be reduced.

Or you could graze tame grass pastures first. Access to pastures planted with introduced cool-season grasses, such as fescue and brome, provides early season flexibility and avoids early grazing on native pastures which may compromise production later in the season. These pastures are typically ready to be grazed 2 or more weeks before native pastures.

A recent study demonstrated that native winter pastures could be grazed in mid-May at about 25% relative use without a decrease in stockpiled winter forage. Exceeding 25% use or extending grazing into mid-June, however, could reduce forage in those pastures that you will need next winter.

Research suggests that grass plants are most vulnerable to grazing before they have formed three new leaves. Knowing how many growing degree days are required to reach the 3-leaf stage provides a general "rule-of-thumb" about plant development. The date that grasses reach the 3-leaf stage varies considerably, so examining the important plants in your own pasture is recommended.