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CC164 Using Temporary Pastures

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Using Temporary Pastures

- Sudan furnishes nutritious pasture in hot weather.
- Rye gives excellent forage in the fall and early spring.

EXTENSION SERVICE - UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATING W. V. Lambert, Director
USING TEMPORARY PASTURES

Temporary pastures are an important source of forage for many Nebraska farmers. They become doubly important when overgrazing reduces the yield of permanent pastures. Where permanent pastures have been destroyed, a system of temporary pastures is essential if the permanent pastures are to be re-established.

Sudan and winter rye are Nebraska's most important temporary pasture crops. Spring small grain, biennial sweetclover, and winter wheat may contribute a sizable amount of forage to the feed supplies in some areas.

RYE planted late in the summer provides some grazing in the fall and is usually very productive the following spring. Under average conditions, rye in southern and southeastern Nebraska can be pastured shortly after April 1. Northward and westward the initial grazing date is usually later. Rye provides high protein pasturage early in the season before most permanent pastures should be grazed. The inclusion of hairy vetch extends the grazing season and produces forage of higher protein.

You should recognize that milk may become tainted when animals are pastured on rye. Removing the animals from the rye pasture several hours before milking will reduce tainting effects.

SUDAN GRASS is our most productive warm-season temporary pasture. It makes rapid growth following planting in late May or early June and provides excellent pasture during July, August, and early September. To a lesser extent it provides pasture until growth is stopped by frost.

Cattle and sheep sometimes suffer from hydrocyanic or prussic acid poisoning after grazing Sudan that has been stunted by drought or frost. The new growth, which occurs at the base of the plant, causes the poisoning. The more mature growth is generally safe. After the Sudan is thoroughly dried either as hay or following a killing frost, the danger of prussic acid poisoning is virtually eliminated.

The following steps will reduce the danger of prussic acid poisoning:

1. Use certified seed of Piper and Wheeler varieties. Nebraska experiments show that Wheeler contains 2.5 times less and Piper about 14 times less hydrocyanic acid than Texas Sweet.
2. Delay pasturing until the crop is at least one foot tall.
3. Feed the stock well before they are turned into Sudan.
4. Keep the stock on Sudan continuously after grazing has been started.
5. Use caution when grazing Sudan that has been stunted by frost or drought.
6. Prior to pasturing, pull out sorghum-type plants from stands planted with impure seed.

BIENNIAL SWEETCLOVER, where adapted, is valuable in a temporary pasture rotation. Grazing of the second-year growth usually starts during the latter part of April and reaches its height during May and early June after which it gradually tapers off during July. Second-year sweetclover should be kept well grazed for best results.
First-year sweetclover provides a limited amount of forage during the late summer and early fall months. Graze it lightly. Excessive grazing of first-year growth may result in reduced yields during the second year. The newer varieties Madrid, Evergreen, and Spanish will furnish more forage than common sweetclover.

Pasturing sweetclover involves some danger of bloat. You can reduce this danger by (1) feeding the animals well before turning them into the sweetclover, (2) having dry roughage available in the pasture, and (3) making water and salt readily accessible.

Interest in sweetclover in parts of Nebraska has declined in recent years because of increased soil acidity and sweetclover weevil infestations. To insure good stands of sweetclover, the soil should be tested and the recommended amounts of lime and fertilizer supplied prior to seeding.

**WINTER WHEAT** furnishes fall and spring grazing which compares favorably with winter rye. The seeding of winter wheat specifically for temporary pastures should be cleared with the local ASC offices. Even though the wheat is not to be harvested for grain, its destruction is required in late spring for compliance with present government programs. From this standpoint, rye would be a more desirable crop to use.

Winter wheat that has been planted for grain harvest should not be grazed after about May 1. Later grazing may seriously reduce yields.

**SPRING GRAINS** will furnish grazing during May and June in years of normal rainfall. If oats or barley are grazed, there is little chance of harvesting grain. The utilization of oats as silage should be given serious consideration where feed shortages exist.

**BALANCE YOUR PASTURE PROGRAM**

To secure maximum yields from non-irrigated pastures in Nebraska, a combination of permanent pastures with a temporary pasture plan is necessary. There is no single crop, or single mixture of grasses and legumes that will remain productive throughout the pasture season in Nebraska. Therefore, a balance of well-managed perennial grasses and legumes supplemented with temporary pastures will provide the longest pasture season and the most production per acre.

This circular is a publication of the Pasture Committee of the Nebraska College of Agriculture. It was prepared by Herman Gorz, C. W. Nibler and LeRoy Peters.