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CC168 Green Chop Feeding

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GREEN CHOP FEEDING

- Better utilization of pasture forage.
- Reduce losses from selective grazing.
- More uniform milk production.

EXTENSION SERVICE - UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATING W. V. Lambert, Director
GREEN CHOP FEEDING

A. What is "green chop feeding?" Many farmers refer to "green chop feeding as—"soilage," "zero pasture," "green chop," or "green feeding." All terms refer to a system of management in which pastures are harvested by machine rather than by the animals. The machine-harvested forage is then fed to the livestock in self-feeding wagons or conventional feed bunks in dry lot.

B. How is "green chop Feeding" used? Green chop may be used in a variety of ways. (1) It may be used to supplement a pasture grazing program. (2) It may completely replace grazing. (3) It may be used to supplement a "dry lot" feeding program.

C. What are some of the advantages?
1. Greater utilization of forage is possible than with rotation or continuous grazing.

2. Forage plants are allowed to reach optimum production before each chopping, which results in more milk or meat per acre than with grazing.
3. Losses from selective grazing, from trampling, and from spoilage due to droppings, are avoided.

![Diagram of grazing versus green chop feeding]
4. "Green chop" enables the farmer to maintain a variety of forage plants difficult to maintain with grazing.

5. Less energy is expended by the animals in obtaining feed.

6. Fields may be larger, thus more efficient to harvest. Fencing may be eliminated.

7. Damage to the soil and grasses through compaction is reduced.

8. Green chop feeding tends to eliminate daily fluctuations in milk production common in grazing dairy herds. One reason for this is that green chopping helps assure a minimum daily intake of a balanced diet.

D. What are some of the disadvantages?

1. Additional equipment costs are involved when green feed is cut and brought to the animals.
   a. A forage harvester and hauling and feeding equipment are necessary.
   b. This means new capital investment if this equipment is not already owned.

2. Additional labor and power are required. Labor and equipment requirements for green chop feeding are about triple those for grazing.

3. Hay and/or silage must be available at all times in case of mechanical breakdown.

4. Wet fields may make the daily task of cutting and hauling the green feed difficult.

5. It is doubtful if green chop feeding is an economical practice for dairy herds of less than 35 head.

6. Sanitation problems are greatly increased when livestock are kept in dry lots throughout the summer.

E. What are some of the special management problems?

1. Livestock generally will consume more green feed when it is fed twice a day than when it is fed only once a day. However, the extra labor involved can be justified only if the increased consumption results in increased production.

2. Heating seems to reduce the palatability of green chopped feed for most livestock. This problem becomes most serious in extremely warm
weather or when the animals are getting more green chop than they can clean up quickly.

3. Fields that are used for green chop need to be kept free of weeds that cause off flavors in milk or are poisonous to the animals. When pas-
tures are chopped, livestock tend to consume all of the forage, weeds and grasses alike, whereas under grazing, livestock may be able to avoid the weeds.

4. In order to harvest the majority of the forage at the most desirable stage of maturity, it usually is necessary to harvest part of the crop as hay or silage. This is particularly true during the early part of the season when plant growth is very rapid.

5. Another problem encountered in green chopping is maintaining an adequate but not wasteful supply of succulent forage to chop during the entire summer season. One solution is to grow a fast-growing crop—Sudan Grass—to use in mid-summer when other crops, such as alfalfa brome, often become too mature if left for chopping.

6. Green chopping of legumes and feeding them in dry lot reduces the incidence of bloat in some cases. However, chopping alone should not be considered the final answer to the bloat problem.

**F. Will it pay to change to green chop?**

Here are some of the possible changes in costs, and of increases in gross income.

1. **Added costs.**

   a. Cost of cutting and hauling green feed. If field harvester and silage wagons are owned—Additional costs such as for fuel and oil, repairs, and wear and tear on the tractor, field harvester, and wagons or trucks. If the field harvester and wagons are not owned—Additional variable costs for tractor plus all costs of field harvester and wagons, including repairs, depreciation, interest, taxes, insurance, and housing. If this new equipment also is used to fill silos, the overhead costs should be divided between the two operations.

   b. Cost of facilities for feeding green feed.

   c. Cost of additional labor in cutting, hauling, and handling the green feed each day.

   d. Cost of additional feed, labor, materials and services, and overhead expenses resulting from an increase in number of cows.
2. **Reduced costs.**
   a. Cost of using a stationary ensilage cutter, or hiring a custom machine, if replaced by a field harvester.
   b. Cost of fencing and providing water in pastures.
   c. Cost of purchased feed if grain rations are reduced as a result of more and better pasture and forage.

3. **Increased income.**
   a. Income from increased production per acre.
   
   b. Income from sale of crops when no change is made in number of cows or in feeding practices and land is released for production of cash crops.
Green chop feeding is only one way to manage pastures. Whether you graze or green chop your pastures, good all-around management practices need to be followed. Weed control, fertilization, irrigation, use of temporary pastures, establishment, proper choice of forage varieties, insect control, and the overall economics of pasture on your particular farm are all important factors to consider.

Many livestock men will probably increase their net income more by improving on the grazing practices they now use rather than shifting to a new system. Changing to a new system usually calls for learning new management practices and for an overall higher level of management ability.

Listed below are other publications of this series that are designed to help you improve your pasture program.

1. Using Temporary Pastures (CC 164)
2. Establishing Pastures in Nebraska (CC 165)
3. Choice of Perennial Grasses for Forage Production and Erosion Control (CC 166)
4. How to Use Pastures (CC 167)

This circular is a publication of the Pasture Committee of the Nebraska College of Agriculture. It was prepared by Philip Cole, M. A. Alexander, Neal Shafer, Keith Zoellner and Don Clanton.
GREEN
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