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### **The Effects of Late Season Usage on Cool Season Grasses**

What a nice change of pace this fall has (thus far...) been as compared to the last few. Moisture across at least *parts* of the area has resulted in decent late summer forage growth from pastures and many hay fields have recovered nicely following harvest. While we've seemingly gained at least a little ground over years past, our challenge now is maintaining that gain. There are a lot of variables we'll face over the next 60 days, but keeping in mind some basic management principals can help us start 2024 off on the right foot.

First of all, perennial forages will more often than not benefit from a period of rest and regrowth prior to fall dormancy. The combination of adequate moisture and moderate temperatures have provided for some excellent regrowth thus far with many stands not only increasing forage biomass, but likely building root systems as well. That combination of root and shoot growth is an oft overlooked, but very important part of the plant's growth and development. It helps the plant go in to the dormant season in good shape while increasing winter hardiness and providing the opportunity for rapid greenup and growth next spring.

If you're still grazing, keep in mind that four to six inches of green growth is the *minimum* suggested height prior to entering dormancy. Plants with less regrowth often don't have the photosynthetic capacity to simultaneously produce top *and* root growth, meaning root systems may be weakened going in to dormancy. A weakened root system now may result in slower green up – and potential yield reductions – in the future.

If regrowth is so plentiful that you're considering a second cutting, it might work – but it's risky. As mentioned above, failure to leave adequate plant height going into dormancy can result in slower greenup next spring and a loss of winterhardiness. Any harvest now should be done with an eye on the future. In the near future, will the stand have enough time to recover with adequate regrowth before dormancy? In the distant future, can you stand forage production losses that may occur if adequate regrowth levels are not attained? If you can't answer in the affirmative to both of those questions, it may be best to leave stands as they are.

It won't be fun this week, but take some time as the weather cools this fall to take a second look at grass stands. Hopefully, this will be the fall we can get some of these stands back on track and headed in a productive direction.