Early Spring Grazing Tips: Manage Height, Cut Early

MT. VERNON, MO.

A frequently asked question in late May-early June is, "how come my pastures look so spotty grazed?"

The answer is fairly simple, but hard to do much about for that grazing season, according to Eldon Cole, a livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

"An evenly-grazed pasture in early summer usually results from optimal grazing pressure early in the spring. Get on the pastures early with enough cattle to graze it off like you would with a mower," said Cole.

According to Cole, don't leave the cattle on very long and plan on returning for several grazing bouts. When grass is growing fast, the rest period can be only 10 to 14 days.

"This type of grazing management reduces your chances of having that ragged, spot-grazed pasture later this year," said Cole.

If a producer's cattle population is too small to graze the pastures down to a three inch height, use power fencing to force the cattle to achieve that grazing height.

Keeping the grass, usually fescue, short early in the season also aids in new legume seedling establishment that may be in the mix. Pastures that get away and grow too tall should be cut for hay early in May.

"A May cutting makes excellent hay and sets the pasture up for hay cutting in July or it can be worked into the grazing rotation the rest of the year," said Cole.

A three-day grazing school goes into more detail on grazing management. Grazing schools are being offered during 2011 on different start dates at different southwest Missouri locations: Mt. Vernon (May 24), Neosho (June 14), Marshfield (Sept. 13), Forsyth (Sept. 19) and Bois D'Arc (Oct. 18).

Information about other schools around the state is available on the Missouri Forage and Grassland Council website at http://agebb.missouri.edu/mfgc.

Attendance is generally limited to 25-30 people. Cost of the schools varies by location, and includes all of the materials (grazing manuals, guides, grazing stick). Daytime schools usually include meals and breaks and some include transportation. Δ