

# Stockpiling Tall Fescue For Deferred Grazing

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**T**all fescue has the ability to accumulate significant growth during the cool, fall months. Producers can maximize this fall growth by the judicious application of nitrogen fertilizer now. Stockpiling fescue as standing forage in the pasture, and utilizing it through deferred grazing it during late fall and early winter has several benefits. It is an effective and efficient method of extending the grazing season, keeping animals outside on pasture in a healthier environment. It also minimizes mechanical forage harvesting and storage costs, as well as manure storage and handling costs.

Fescue stockpiling begins by removing animals from the pasture in early August, and applying nitrogen fertilizer to stimulate forage growth as the plants come out of summer dormancy. Although the amount of forage accumulation will vary from year to year based upon location, soil type and environmental condi-

tions, tall fescue responds to nitrogen fertilization as well as or better than any other forage grass. Forage increases of 20 pounds of dry matter per acre per pound of nitrogen applied are achievable. In addition to the increase in forage production, forage crude protein also increases while neutral detergent fiber decreases.

How much nitrogen to apply depends upon several factors: the thickness and uniformity of the grass stand; whether or not legumes are present in the sward; and the cost of nitrogen fertilizer. If at least 30 percent of the forage mix consists of legumes such as clover, additional nitrogen fertilizer may not be needed. On the other hand, if the forage mix is predominantly grass, then 50 to 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre should be applied.

The most efficient yield boost comes from the first 50 pounds of N applied. As nitrogen application rates increase, N use efficiency decreases. As a result, N applications greater than 100 pounds per acre are less likely to provide an economic return. Δ

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