

# Ozark Stockman

An informal Newsletter for Livestock Producers in the Missouri Ozarks and abroad...  
Published by Ted Cunningham, Regional Livestock Specialist, MU Extension

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## Plan Now For Stockpiling Fescue This Fall

There are a number of reasons livestock producers don't care for fescue. However fescue has one very redeeming quality, that being its ability to grow vigorously in the fall and then maintain its nutritional value well into the winter months. And considering the lower than average yield of our hay crop this year coupled with little hay leftover from this past winter, although we are a long way from winter feeding, this may be a good time to start planning to take advantage of stockpiling fescue.

The practice of "stockpiling" is not a new concept. Its been used for years, on a number of plant species, and has been well documented as the one of the best (if not the best) ways to lengthen the grazing season into the winter months. And considering the greatest expense of any livestock enterprise is feed, particularly winter feeding of hay, its pretty easy to see how managing for winter



grazing rather than feeding costly hay provides some serious economic incentives.

In a nutshell, fescue works extremely well for stockpiling purposes. The same waxy leaf coat that makes fescue shine in the summer sun, is also present in winter and serves as a preservative of sorts, making the plant less susceptible to frost damage, hence preserving the plants nutritional quality. Additionally, due to fescue's fall growth pattern, which does not produce a seed head, the problems with endophyte are lessened, and feeding during cooler winter months reduces the heat stress on the animal normally seen during the summer.

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## Pull your Bull for Increased Profit

I visit with a number of folks each year that struggle with the idea and implementation of a defined breeding/calving season. There are a number of reasons that are used for leaving the bull in "year-round" and while I understand the merit behind some of them, there's undoubtedly a lot of profit left on the

table when bulls are run with the cows for extended periods of time or year round.

In past issues I've discussed a number of traits and factors that affect profitability in the beef enterprise, however, I've failed to hit on the most important trait...Fertility. The golden rule of cow/calf production is

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### Subscription Info:

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1. Email or call the Dent County Extension office and request to be put on the Ozark Stockman email distribution list.
2. Download the Ozark Stockman from our website at <http://extension.missouri.edu/dent/>. Each bi-monthly issue will be posted on this site as well as archived issues.
3. If you wish to receive this newsletter, but simply don't have internet/email access, give us a call and we'll work something out.

## A New Look at Creep Feeding

A simple definition of creep feeding is the practice of supplying supplemental feed to nursing calves. While traditionally creep feeding has involved the use of supplemental feedstuffs such as corn, oats, by-product feeds and other grains using “creep feeders”, there exists no hard and fast rule that creep feeding can't be done with forages alone. And considering the rising cost of these traditional creep feedstuffs, perhaps its time to examine the concept of Creep Grazing.

Creep grazing involves providing an opportunity for nursing calves to “escape” the pasture their mother's are in to an adjacent pasture or paddock containing higher quality forages. While there are many approaches to the “escape”, and many producers have been accidentally allowing calves to escape and creep graze for years, actually planning for this practice is seldom occurs.



Creep grazing can be as simple as raising a single strand electric fence allowing calves to have early access to a paddock that the cows won't graze until later, or as complicated as providing “exclusive” creep grazing strips along or between paddocks containing legumes and other forages managed solely for adding weight to nursing calves.

Allowing calves to “escape” can be accomplished using creep gates, which are designed to sit in the fence line or corner and provide an opening large enough for calves to pass, but too small for cows. Typically, these gates range from 15-18 inches wide, and 36-42 inches high. If you're accustomed to electric or power fencing, electric creep gates can be constructed by installing insulated gate handles between two permanent posts and adjusting the height according to calf size. And of course, with single or double strand electric fence you can always just raise a section of the fence to allow calves to pass easily.

Location of the creep gate should allow calves easy access to a high quality, palatable forage. When starting calves on creep pasture it may be necessary for the first time or two to allow access to the pasture/paddock to both cows and calves. Early in the creep season, it may also be a good idea to locate creep gates near mineral/

water/shade as these are natural loafing areas and will encourage use. Generally, if the creep pasture your using is good, the natural curiosity coupled with the appetite of the calves will be enough to entice them to continue “escaping” for a better bite.

Forages best suited for creep grazing include legumes such as clover and alfalfa, as these are nearly always higher in protein and energy and more palatable for calves. However, properly managed fescue, orchardgrass, and grass/legume mixes can work very well. Because of the July-August “summer slump” period of our fescue, the use of summer annuals such as millet or sudangrass can also be used, but again must be properly managed for optimum creep grazing. Turnips, wheat, and rye may be viable option for winter/spring creep grazing of fall calves.

Creep grazing has numerous benefits aside from the obvious benefit of increasing weaning weights. Creep grazing typically is more economical than traditional creep feeding. It allows for increased stocking rates without sacrificing calf weaning weights, and lessens the burden on your lactating cows. Creep grazing tends to keep calves from getting as fleshy as calves creep fed grain diets and although it has not been thoroughly researched it is likely that creep grazing of heifer calves will have less of a detrimental effect on the lifetime milk production if those heifers are kept as replacements.

If you have questions about creep grazing feel free to give me a call or visit one of the following links for additional information at the Nobel Foundation or the University of Kentucky. Go to [www.noble.org/Ag/Forage/CreepGrazing/](http://www.noble.org/Ag/Forage/CreepGrazing/) or [www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id76/id76.htm](http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id76/id76.htm)

## Planning for Stockpiling...(continued from page 1)

Mark Kennedy, State Grassland Specialist with Natural Resources Conservation Service outlines the 5 steps critical to managing for a successful fescue stockpile.

1. Start with pastures that have been grazed or clipped to leave only 3-6 inches of leaf by mid to late August.
2. Apply 40-60 pounds of nitrogen from August 15 to August 31 or approximately 60-90 days prior to the end of the growing season.
3. If you start prior to August 15 the yield will **not** be significantly greater but the quality can be significantly lower. Delaying initiation of stockpiling will result in higher quality forage but lower forage yields.
4. Defer grazing until mid-December or until all other pastures have been utilized.
5. Try to stockpile 1 acre per cow. Under normal conditions this would give a 75-90 day feed supply, if fed out properly.

Once you've grown your stockpile, its time to start thinking about how you can most efficiently feed the growth to stretch your supply and maximize grazing days. A technique called stripgrazing is the best method of "feeding" the stockpile efficiently. This grazing principle, which incorporates the use of portable/temporary fencing, allows for allotment of only a part of the stockpiled pasture to be grazed. Allowing cows to have access to an entire field of stockpile would be much the same as if you set out your entire hay supply on the first day of winter. Stripgrazing will decrease trampling, reduce waste, and otherwise increase the grazing efficiency of the stockpile. Research has shown that allocating stockpile in a 3 day feed strip or less produced 40% more grazing days per acre when compared to allocating a 14 day feed supply.

Whether you're a big or small producer, properly managed stockpiled fescue will pay big dividends. The savings from reduced hay feeding and decreased need to provide supplemental protein/energy add up on any scale. While it may require a little extra time in the beginning to get set up to stockpile, I'm certain it will become easier and easier each year.

## Pull Your Bull...(continued from page 1)

that every cow must have a calf in a 365 day period or less. When bulls are run for extended periods of time, it becomes pretty easy to loose track of fertility management. Tightening the calving season, along with pregnancy testing will quickly help strengthen the fertility of your herd and cull those cows who can't hit the 365 day benchmark using your production environment and inputs.

A summary of data from 394 ranches in New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma involved in Standardized Performance Analysis (SPA) summaries helps to clarify the benefit of having a controlled breeding season. The breeding season on these ranches ranged from less than a month to 365 days.

The result of this analysis found that for the producer who leaves the bull in year-round, that producer would sell 45.82 fewer pounds of calf per cow per year on the average than producers with a 75 day breeding season. That same producer would have \$13.63 greater costs per hundredweight of weaned calf than the producer that used a 75 day breeding season.

Another big benefit of a defined breeding season is that it allows you to more efficiently use your labor re-

sources. Who really wants to check for new calves on the Fourth of July, or Christmas Eve, or when you need to be in the hay field. Additionally, being able to wean and market all of your calves as a uniform group and more accordingly manage the nutritional, health and reproductive status of all your cows at once certainly helps you better manage your operation and your time.

A common reason for running a bull continuously with the cow-herd is a lack of facility to house the bull during the off season. I recently read where a good solution to this problem, if you simply can't find good place to keep the bull from the cows, is to pregnancy test all cows 45-50 days after the breeding season and cull any less than 45-50 days pregnant at that time.

For producers who have fairly large herds that calve year round another option is to try to separate your cows into a fall and spring calving herds. Grouping these cows by calving season, and then implementing a controlled breeding season for each respective herd should result in a quick way to at least get a handle on your calf crop and help you to start reaping the full benefits of a defined calving season.

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## *Calendar of events*

### June

2—"The Basics and Beyond" Sheep and Goat Workshop, Houston, MO—Contact Top of the Ozarks RC&D at 417-967-2028 ext 5.

16—Dent County Steer and Heifer Classic, Missouri Cattleman Association Point Sanctioned Junior Show, Salem—Contact 573-729-3196 for more information

21-22—MU Wurdack Farm Grazing School, Cook Station—Contact 573-729-3196 for more information

### July

7—Dent County Beef Preview Show

18-21—Crawford County Fair, Cuba

18-20—Houston Grazing School, Houston—Contact Sandy Wooten, 417-967-2028 ext. 4