



NEWSLETTER

Driftless Ag Update

Ag news for La Crosse, Vernon, and Crawford Counties from UW-Madison Extension



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Here's your March Driftless Ag Update!

Hello and congratulations on receiving our March Driftless Ag Update! This newsletter is co-written by your local UW-Madison Extension Ag Educators, Beth McIlquham (livestock) and Sam Bibby (crops).

Please contact your local extension office for the print version of any article included in this newsletter.

Notes from your Regional Crops Educator- Sam Bibby

- We are hosting an Organic Crop Production Workshop on April 16th @ 10:30am. Online registration is not set up yet however you can RSVP through my email or phone number at the bottom of this email. It was a great workshop last year and we are looking forward to building on it. Dr. Erin Silva and her OGRAIN Team will be joining us to discuss their latest research around organic crop production.
- Pesticide applicator trainings are happening now. If you are a private applicator check your certification expiration. I am hosting three in-person trainings this winter, one in each of my three counties. After the four-hour training you may take the exam. Remember to order your training manual ahead of time. Please reach out to me with questions.
- The Wisc Weeds Annual Report is out and available for download. This report highlights and summarizes all of the herbicide trials from the Wisc Weeds Team. It is an excellent resource for comparing different products, combinations, and timings on different weed species in corn and soybeans.

Notes from your Regional Livestock Educator- Beth McIlquham

- Noontime Beef Roundup: The final topic for the 2025 Noontime Beef Roundup will be on March 13 at 12:00 PM via Zoom. Adam Hartfiel and I will be discussing direct marketing. The discussion will begin with talking about beef quality, then we will chat about strategies to produce high quality beef. Wrapping up the discussion, we discuss why these things matter when it comes to connecting with consumers. For more information and to register, visit <https://go.wisc.edu/4e791d>
- 2025 Small Ruminant Webinar Series: There are still two discussions left in the 2025 Small Ruminant Webinar series. On March 27, there will be a panel of entrepreneurs talking about their experiences with sheep products and services. Then on April 24, Dr. Cody Gifford from University of Wyoming will discuss lamb carcass quality. For more information and to register, visit <https://go.wisc.edu/srw25>
- Disease Digest: To see where H5N1 is affecting livestock in the U.S., use this interactive map:
<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-detections/hpai-confirmed-cases-livestock>
For a tighter focus on how it is affecting Wisconsin's poultry, check out this map:
<https://widatcp.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=41c12066a88043288d7ca51abf8fa641>
For animal owners of all kinds, please evaluate your biosecurity protocols. If you need help or need some biosecurity tips and tricks, please contact Beth at (608) 632-0599 or at beth.mcilquham@wisc.edu.

Parasite Patrol: Mastering Fecal Egg Counts for Healthier Goat Herds and Sheep Flocks



The University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension is hosting a workshop highlighting intestinal parasite management for Sheep Producers.

Intestinal parasites in sheep can significantly impact the health and performance of a flock. From decreased production to a compromised immune system, sheep owners of all types can struggle with high parasite loads. Extension colleagues are excited to share this workshop to equip producers with tools and strategies to help curb intestinal parasites in their flocks. Topics for this event include:

- Intestinal parasite lifecycle
- Development of resistance
- Management strategies
- Hands-on experience with fecal egg counts (FEC) using a fecal sample from their animals

Sheep producers with any size flock are welcome to join. Pre-registration is required. This workshop will provide attendees with a greater understanding of intestinal parasite load, what effects it, and how to treat it effectively. Participants will also leave with a microscope slide and instructions to perform more at-home fecal egg counts.

Date and Location

March 21, 2025, 1-4 p.m.

Hildebrand Memorial Library

1033 Wisconsin Avenue Boscobel, WI 53805

Registration Details

Cost: \$25

(includes the option to take home McMaster slide for at-home fecal egg counts)

Register here: <https://eventreg.wisc.edu/en/5f4YRxR7/g/extension/internal-parasite-management-march-21-2025-5a2TQr16emz/overview>

2025 VIRTUAL NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT TRAINING FOR FARMERS

Learn how to write
your own nutrient
management plan!

Jan. 10 or March 14
10 a.m. – 3 p.m.
Live via Zoom
Free

The Nutrient and Pest Management Program within the University of Wisconsin–Madison Division of Extension and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) are offering a virtual training for farmers interested in writing their own nutrient management plans. This training provides both the basics of nutrient management and an introduction to SnapPlus. The same training will be offered on two dates, January 10 and March 14, 2025, from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. online via Zoom.



Agriculture Institute
DIVISION OF EXTENSION
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



Scan QR code or visit go.wisc.edu/OnlineNMTraining to register.
Questions? Contact Dan Smith: dhsmith@wisc.edu or (608) 219-5170

SCHEDULE

10:00 – 10:15	Why Nutrient Management?
10:15 – 10:30	Soil Sampling
10:30 – 10:45	Soil Test Interpretation
10:45 – 11:00	Soil pH and Liming
11:00 – 11:15	Break
11:15 – 11:35	Manure and Legume Crediting
11:35 – 12:05	Nitrogen Management
12:05 – 12:40	Lunch Break
12:40 – 1:10	Phosphorus Management
1:10 – 1:25	Soil Test P and Water Quality Implications
1:25 – 1:40	Potassium Management
1:40 – 2:00	Manure Application Precautions
2:00 – 2:10	Break
2:10 – 2:25	Soil Conservation
2:25 – 3:00	SnapPlus Introduction

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When can I start grazing?

Each year, in May when the dandelions start showing their faces, the most common topic of discussion in the grazing and livestock world is “When can I start grazing?” While those lush, green pastures look awfully inviting after months of feeding hay, **farmers must pause and make a wise, informed decision regarding when to start grazing because starting too soon can result in a dramatic shortening of a month or more at the end of the grazing season.** This is a case where patience is definitely a virtue, as deciding the exact day to celebrate “spring turnout” often requires waiting just a bit longer than desired. How then, can we confidently answer the question: *When can I start grazing?*

Deciding when to start grazing depends mostly on two things:

- 1) Condition of the pasture
- 2) Amount of forage available

Determine pasture condition

Determining the condition of the pasture is quite simple. Are the soil moisture conditions conducive to hoof traffic, or is the pasture still so wet that it's susceptible to compaction and pugging? In new seedings, you may also need to determine that the forage is established enough that it won't be uprooted when grazed by livestock. This can simply be determined by doing a “hand pull test,” simulating grazing. Do the leaves tear off the plant or are you pulling up the whole plant including the roots? When the soil moisture and forage conditions are conducive to grazing, the spring turnout decision rests solely on how much forage is available – the pasture inventory.

Use a grazing stick

A grazing stick can be used to estimate pasture inventory. The result will be an estimate of total forage presently available, which will then be translated to the number of days of forage available for the size and number of animals on the farm. In spring and early summer, when cool season pastures are growing rapidly, adding about 100 lb of dry matter/acre/day, the goal is to have at least 10 to 20 days of forage available when you start. When this “spring flush” is over, growth slows, and it is recommended to always maintain 30-40 days of available forage through the rest of the grazing season.

As eager as we and our livestock are to get out on pasture, it will benefit all of us to be patient. Pasture health and productivity will benefit, and a slightly more mature pasture will also help maintain body condition and ease the rumen transition from stored feeds to fresh pasture. So, when can you start grazing in the spring? You can start grazing when soil conditions are right and there are 10-20 days of forage available.





Using a Grazing Stick to Create a Forage Inventory

UW-Madison Division of Extension

Every Grazier Needs a Grazing Stick

Few exercises are more important to a grazing operation than managing your forage inventory. A forage inventory involves monitoring how much forage is available at various points of the season, as well as projecting forage availability throughout the season to ensure the farm is on track to meet its production goals. In spring a forage inventory determines when pastures are ready to be grazed, while during the summer slump it can help to avoid running out of pasture. By managing your forage inventory, you can extend the grazing season as long as possible and maintain a robust, healthy pasture for many years. The simplicity of a grazing stick should not be mistaken as a lack of usefulness or accuracy. Grazing sticks are widely used with success across the world. While there are more high-tech tools you can use, a grazing stick is the most simple, practical and helpful tool for taking a forage inventory and managing pasture yield and quality.

What a Grazing Stick Tells Us

Like other, more costly forage measuring devices, the grazing stick provides an estimate of current forage availability in a particular paddock. Like any tool, some skill and knowledge is needed to use a grazing stick accurately. While the guidelines for well-managed grazing such as maintaining proper residual height are fairly universal, predictions for forage quantity can be highly variable. An accurate estimate of pasture yield requires consideration of climate, soil type, soil fertility, grass species, density of the sward, and whether there are legumes present. Regardless of what you use to measure, these things must be considered to estimate forage yield and determine when to graze. In the remainder of this publication, we will walk through how to consider each factor while creating a forage inventory.



Figure 1. Grazing sticks are an important tool for determining when grazing can begin in the spring.

How a Grazing Stick Works

A grazing stick estimates forage yield based on the **height** and **density** of standing pasture forage as well as the type of forage present. A yield estimate is only helpful if it is accurate, so it is important that graziers have a realistic assessment of the density of their forage and productivity of their soil. Overestimating available forage can result in prematurely running out of pasture or overgrazing, both of which can cause long-term damage. A grazing stick can help a farmer estimate the forage density, allowing one to, over time, develop an “eye” for what a good, marginal, or poor stand looks like for their forage species and soil type. Following is the process of using a grazing stick to estimate forage yield:

1. **Identify species present in pasture** – it is important to know what you have growing in your pasture; plant species structure has a significant impact on forage yield estimation.



◀ UW-Extension publications A3637 and A3787 can help to identify grasses and legumes in your pastures.

Figure 2. The dot scale is one method of assessing forage density, an important factor for estimating forage yield.



2. **Estimate forage density** – GrassWorks grazing sticks have a dot graph on one side for visually assessing forage density. Slide the stick into the sward horizontally at ground level and count the dots you can see while looking straight down from a standing position. The stick estimates density based on the number of dots visible. This should be done at multiple locations to establish an average stand density for the paddock you're measuring.
3. **Measure average forage height** – forage height is measured by holding the grazing stick vertically in the pasture vegetation. The height is read not at the height that the tallest leaves reach, but at the height of the densest part of the vegetation. In the photo on page 1, the height reading would not be at 9" where the tallest leaves reach, but at 6 or 7" where the stand is thickest. This measurement should be made at 10 to 20 locations representative of each paddock, with an average height calculated.
4. **Calculate forage yield** – the chart on the stick and in Figure 3 provides a forage availability estimate based on the average height and density of the sward. These estimates have been calibrated for each species or combination using clipped and dried samples. Subtract 4" (residual height) from the average pasture height and multiply that value by the estimated pounds of dry matter per acre/inch. *Residual height is critical to pasture productivity. While 4" is the recommended minimum, leaving more residual by "taking half and leaving half" is a best-management rule of thumb.*
5. **Replicate** – this process should be completed multiple times for the entire farm throughout the grazing season. Frequency should increase when favorable conditions result in rapid growth or when dry hot conditions begin to limit forage availability.

An Example:

In the chart, we see that a pasture with a medium density of orchardgrass/red clover has 250-300 lb dry matter/inch. If you've measured sward height at 10" the estimated forage availability is 2500-3000 lb/acre (10" x 250-300 lb/inch). Leaving a residual of 4" gives you 6" of grazable forage, or about 1500-1800 lb/acre. Assuming a 1000 lb animal unit requires 40 lb of dry matter per day (4% of body weight = 2.5% consumed, 1.5% trampled), an acre of pasture will feed 1 animal unit for 38-45 days or 38-45 animal units for 1 day.

Sward Density:	High	Medium	Low
Forage Type	Pounds of DM/inch/acre		
Alfalfa/Grass	250-300	200-250	150-200
Bluegrass Mix + N	350-400	200-250	100-150
Bluegrass/Clover	350-400	250-300	150-200
Bromegrass/Orchardgrass + N	250-300	200-250	100-150
Bromegrass/Orchardgrass + Clover	300-350	250-300	150-200
Meadow Fescue	250-300	200-250	100-150
Meadow Fescue + Clover	300-350	250-300	150-200
Perennial Ryegrass + N	350-400	200-250	100-150
Perennial Ryegrass + Clover	350-400	250-300	150-200
Tall Fescue + N	350-400	250-300	150-200
Tall Fescue + Clover	350-400	300-350	150-200

Figure 3. Estimated pounds of dry matter (DM) per inch per acre based on sward density for common types of pasture forages.

Putting the Forage Inventory Into Practice

Once a forage inventory is complete, the final and most important step is to determine how it should influence management decisions. This will depend on time of year. Here are a few common considerations:

- **Spring – determining when to begin grazing:** forage growth is rapid in spring (about 100 lbs DM/acre/day), but there must be enough available forage to suit the number of animals for 10-20 days before grazing should start
- **Mid-Summer – anticipating summer slump and avoiding running out of pasture:** forage growth slows (40-45 lbs DM/acre/Day), so there must be enough forage to suit the number of animals for 30 days or more. If there is not, consider destocking or supplementing with stored feeds.
- **Determining when a paddock is ready to be grazed:** using the 'take-half-leave-half' rule of thumb, a paddock is ready to graze when there is at least as much grazeable forage as the amount of residual you wish to leave. E.g., if you are leaving 4" of residual, there must be at least 8" of growth in the pasture.
- **Determining when extra forage should be harvested:** when the forage inventory on previously grazed paddocks becomes enough to feed the number of animals for 30 or more days, the next rotation can begin and any paddocks remaining ungrazed can be harvested to provide winter feed and to maintain high quality forage in those paddocks.

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Lambing and Kidding Basics

One of the most exciting times for sheep and goat producers is the arrival of baby lambs and goats. Adequate nutrition and proper preparation can ensure the health and safety of dams and their offspring.

The last six weeks of gestation are crucial for monitoring body condition scores (BCS) and providing adequate nutrition and vaccinations. Pregnant ewes and does should have a BCS of 3 to 3.5 on the 5-point BCS scale. This ensures females have enough energy reserves for late pregnancy and lactation. As the fetus(es) grow, they inhabit a larger space in the abdominal cavity, leaving less space for rumen capacity, thus decreasing the amount of nutrition she can acquire from forages. Supplementing the female with grain concentrates can increase nutrition during the last weeks of gestation. Slowly transition to feeding grain to prevent acidosis and the over proliferation of *Clostridium perfringens* bacteria, which can lead to enterotoxemia, AKA overeating disease. To increase the dam's immunity and provide antibodies to young against *Clostridium perfringens* type C & D, vaccinate the gestating female three to four weeks before the lambing/kidding event will also coincide with colostrum development. Consult your veterinarian and develop a vaccination protocol to best fit the needs of your operation.

Parturition, or the process of giving birth, occurs in three phases.

- Phase One is the preparation or pre-labor phase when the cervix dilates and the onset of uterine contractions begins. Phase One can last between 12 to 24 hours. The ewe or doe may isolate herself from the flock or herd, become restless, frequently lay down and get up, urinate or defecate often, paw at the ground, build a nest, have a warm udder, and a mucus discharge from the vulva.
- Phase Two is the delivery phase, or active labor, with strong, forceful uterine contractions. The water bag (amniotic sac) appears first, followed by the lamb or kid. The typical presentation is two feet with the head resting on the front legs, like a diver. Dystocia and abnormal fetal presentation will make delivery difficult. Monitor females to ensure they are making progress. Assistance may be necessary if no progress is made after 30 minutes of strenuous pushing. To assist, restrain the ewe or doe with a halter, wash the vulva with a warm soap solution, put on an OB sleeve, and generously lubricate the OB sleeve. Insert the hand into the vulva to determine the position of the fetus, adjust the presentation, and gently pull the lamb or kid. Only pull if you are pulling two front legs with a head or two back legs of the same lamb or kid. Call your veterinarian for assistance if you are uncomfortable assisting or have tried to pull the lamb or kid for 30 minutes.
- Phase Three, post-labor, is the final phase, during which the fetal membranes and placenta are delivered, typically a few hours after the lamb or kid is born.



After the lamb or kid is born, the dam will clean the offspring, encourage them to stand, and nurse colostrum. Colostrum is the nutrient and immunoglobulin-rich first meal of the newborn lamb or kid; it also contains fats, proteins, lactose, and vitamins. The quality of colostrum synthesized is determined by the dam's overall health and nutritional status during gestation. Therefore, the dam must have the nutrition to meet her dietary needs and vaccinations to boost her immune system. Lambs and kids must receive colostrum within the first two to six hours of life. The earlier, the better in cold weather. Young should receive 10% of their body weight in colostrum in the first 24 hours. 50% of the total amount to be received should be received within the first couple of hours of life, and 50% in two-to-three-ounce increments every three to four hours.

If the dam is not producing colostrum or does not have the volume to provide all offspring with the amount needed, colostrum from another female on the same farm or a powdered colostrum replacer should be used. Due to biosecurity risks, off-farm colostrum must be pasteurized before use. Remember, the preference is "dam is best," followed by a herdmate or a powdered colostrum replacer.

Once the female has given birth, the navel should be treated with 7% iodine, and the family unit can be moved into a smaller 5' x 5' pen called a "jug." The jug allows for the bonding of the young to the dam and vice versa. While in the jug, the producer can monitor the dam's health, feed intake, and udder health to determine if she can raise her young, especially if she has multiple young. Over the next few days, the producer can also monitor the health of the young to ensure they are nursing and receiving adequate nutrition. They can also apply identification tags, castrate, and remove tails if needed.

The season of lambing or kidding will determine the type of facilities needed. Shelters should be dry and well-ventilated during cold or wet seasons to prevent respiratory issues, infections, and hypothermia.

- Ventilation moves air and removes moisture, ammonia, carbon dioxide, and heat. The air exchange rate should be four air changes an hour, one every 15 minutes. Young goats and lambs are susceptible to cold drafts, an air velocity higher than 60 feet per minute (Kammel).
- Bedding should always be kept dry and clean to prevent illness and infections.
- Jugs should be cleaned and disinfected between family units.
- Supplemental heat, such as radiant heat lamps, may be needed, but it should only be used where the ewe or doe cannot access. Radiant heat can also be used in creep areas.
- Family units can be removed from jugs and placed in pens with other family units of similar size and age. Careful monitoring will ensure that dams and offspring find each other and that the young are adequately fed. Try this tip to check if the dam is claiming the young, and if they are receiving adequate nutrition: when young are resting, enter the pen and have the lambs or kids get up; lambs and kids should rise, stretch, and seek the dam to nurse. If young fail to seek the mother, rise and are lethargic, and/or gant, they may not be receiving adequate nutrition. Also, young that are malnourished will try to “rob” a meal from another female. This can lead to injured teats and mastitis. The lamb or kid that is “hungry” should be supplemented or removed from the group and raised on the bottle.

Proper preparation and careful monitoring can help producers provide adequate care and assistance for dams and young during the lambing/kidding season. Getting off to a good start with less labor stress and adequate colostrum intake goes a long way to a healthy future for both dam and offspring.





Three Stages of Bovine Parturition

There are three stages to the birthing process, or parturition: dilation of the cervix, delivery of the calf, and delivery of the placenta. Knowing the normal birth process will help you decide whether or not to intervene.

<https://livestock.extension.wisc.edu/articles/three-stages-of-bovine-parturition/>

Thinking about Farm Succession?



**March 6, 2025
6:00 - 9:00 pm
Richland Campus
Richland Center**



Joy Kirkpatrick and Kelly Wilfert, both Extension Farm Management Outreach Specialists, will provide a framework to help farms to identify legal risks in farm succession and estate planning and to begin those first conversations around succession planning. This workshop will be held on Thursday, March 6, 2025 from 6:00 - 9:00 pm at the Richland Campus, 1100 Highway 14 West, in Melvill Hall (administration building) the Pippin Center.

Conducting Effective On-Farm Research Tools, Technology, and Opportunities

Whether you're new to or experienced with on-farm research, this three-part webinar series has something for everyone!



go.wisc.edu/OnFarmResearchWebinar



For questions, contact:
Abby Augarten at aaugarten@wisc.edu

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**February 27
On-Farm Research
101: From hypothesis
to harvest**

**March 13
Harnessing
Technology for
On-Farm Research**

**March 27
The Latest from UW
On-Farm Research:
Findings &
Opportunities**

*Webinars take place
online via Zoom from
12:00 - 1:00 p.m.*

*Registration is free
but required.*

Conducting Effective On-Farm Research: Tools, Technology, & Opportunities

Whether you're new to or experienced with on-farm research, this three-part webinar series has something for everyone!

March 13 – Harnessing Technology for On-Farm Research

March 27 – The Latest from UW On-Farm Research: Findings & Opportunities

All sessions are 12:00pm – 1:00pm.

Registration is free but required.

<https://cropsandsoils.extension.wisc.edu/2025-on-farm-research-webinar-series-announced/>

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