



NEWSLETTER

Driftless Ag Update

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



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Educator Updates	02
Upcoming Events	04
Staying Ahead of Tar Spot and White Mold in 2026	06
Crossbreeding Can Benefit Cow-Calf Producers	10
Importance of Forage Growth Stages When Grazing Cattle	13

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



Here's your July Driftless Ag Update!

Hello and congratulations on receiving our July Driftless Ag Update!

This newsletter is co-written by your local UW-Madison Extension Ag Educators, Beth McIlquham (livestock) and Sam Bibby (crops).



Notes from your Regional Crops Educator- Sam Bibby

-We will be doing a plot walk of the McClurg NOPP Nitrogen Rate Trial on Oats during the July Bad Axe Watershed Stewards meeting at 6:30pm July 9th. This meeting is open to the public and you are welcome to join, check out the plot and hear how the trial is going.

-Corn and bean prices are worse than dog water.

That's why I am hosting an Alternative Crops Field Day at our home farm where we will have special guest Leslie Schroeder from Midwest Linen Revival speaking about flax for fiber production. We will tour the odd crops we have growing including flax, mustard (not the weed species), sunflowers, rye, and camelina. The event is 1pm-3pm on July 10th at our farm N17878 Toppen Ln, Ettrick WI 54627. Free to attend, open to all. See the flyer below for more details, and as always, call with questions.

-Extension is hosting a Manure Composting Field Day from 10:30am to 3:00pm August 5th at the Lancaster Ag Research Station 7396 WI-35 & 81, Lancaster, WI 53813. Reach out to Landon Baumgartner with questions at (608) 228-5125 or landon.baumgartner@wisc.edu

Notes from your Regional Livestock Educator- Beth McIlquham

-Goodbye!: My last day with Extension will be on July 9. I am thankful for all the connections I've made in this role! In mid-July I will be starting a full-time position with Wisconsin Beef Council. If you need anything before then, reach out! I will still be interacting with many beef producers in my new role, so I am sure I will see many producers out and about. Thank you for your support of Extension and agriculture!

-Disease Digest: To see HPAI updates in dairy herds in Wisconsin, check out the Extension Dairy webpage. To see HPAI updates in poultry flocks, visit the Extension Livestock webpage. New World Screwworm is present in Texas and New Mexico. For more information and confirmed detections, check out the USDA website. For information on Asian Longhorned Ticks, check out the recorded Beef Roundup Webinar session where Dr. Olds presented the latest information. For animal owners of all kinds, please evaluate your biosecurity protocols, including pest management.



Upcoming Events

Badger Crop Connect

Twice-monthly in-season webinars for Wisconsin farmers, agronomists, and crop consultants



go.wisc.edu/BadgerCropConnect

Badger Crop Connect 2026

The Badger Crop Connect webinar series returns Thurs., April 9 at 12:30 p.m. and continues every second and fourth Thursday of the month through October. Tune in for research updates and timely topics for the Wisconsin farmer or agronomist. CCA CEUs available.

Register:

<https://cropsandsoils.extension.wisc.edu/programs/badger-crop-connect/>



ALTERNATIVE CROPS FIELD DAY

Glasgow Valley Farms
N17878 Toppen Ln
Ettrick, WI 54627

JULY 10 1:00pm-3:00pm

JOIN UW-MADISON EXTENSION, WISCONSIN FARMERS UNION, AND MIDWEST LINEN REVIVAL TO EXPLORE ALTERNATIVE CROPS SUCH AS FLAX, RYE, CAMELINA, SUNFLOWERS, AND MUSTARD. WE WILL DISCUSS MARKETS, AGRONOMY, AND CURRENT RESEARCH.

SNACKS WILL BE PROVIDED!



Summer Cow-Calf Workshop

Details

July 23
6:00 PM-8:00 PM
Vernon County Sheriff's Office Training Room
1320 Bad Axe Court
Viroqua, WI 54665

Topics

Handling Facilities
Pregnancy Checking
Strategies for Culling
Weed Control

Cost & Registration

Free
RSVP to Vernon County Extension
Office by July 17
(608) 637-5276

Meal provided by Western
Wisconsin Beef Producers

Great River Graziers Pasture Walks

Join the Great River Graziers for some great pasture walks all summer. These pasture walks are great opportunities to network and learn what is/isn't working on neighboring farms.

See next page for details



GREAT RIVER GRAZIERS

2026 Pasturewalks

All are welcome!

Facilitated by Vance Haugen (507) 459-0495

grg@crawfordstewardship.org

www.crawfordstewardship.org/grg

****check Facebook for schedule updates****

Tuesday May 12 10:30 am	Joe Childs Sparkling Ln. Gays Mills, WI	Location is just outside Mt. Zion. Topic: watering cattle without a well or access to ponds. Joe's operation is a great example of "custom grazing" - where the grazer doesn't own the cattle or the land, but manages both for a head/day fee.
Tuesday May 26 10:30 am	Matthew Canter E7630 Rognstad Ridge Cashton, WI	Fertility with sawdust and manure compost. Timing of pasture moves to make the most of added fertility. The Canter family produces 100% grassfed organic milk.
Tuesday June 9 10:30 am	Andy Mullikin 53280 County Rd. N Wauzeka, WI	Transitioning to organic in the grassfed milk world.
Tuesday June 23 10:30 am	Ryan Studnicka 1435 Blue River Rd. Muscoda, WI	How to extend the grazing season. Stockpiling and limiting the amount of days spent feeding hay. **Note: This event also aims to bring together graziers in the Grant/Iowa County area to form a new pasturewalk group!
Tuesday July 21 10:30 am	Aaron Miller E8477 Octagon Ave. Cashton, WI	Managing the late spring flush and multi-species grazing.
Tuesday August 11 10:30 am	Silas Dudgeon 19663 Stove Rd. Eastman, WI	NRCS EQIP funding for fencing and water line. Discussion how to use NRCS funds to get virtual collars.
*Saturday August 29 10:30 am	Don Boland 18732 Hwy 27 Gays Mills, WI	One year review of switching to a once-a-day milking system.
Tuesday Sept. 15 10:30 am	Kelsey Vance E4998 Irish Ridge Rd. Viroqua, WI	Renovating pasture. Grazing under apple trees and multi-species grazing. We will also review what the fallowed corn field looks like after grazing for an entire season.
Tuesday Sept. 29 10:30 am	Jason Klinge 19769 Hwy 13 Farmersburg, IA	Matching stocking rates with forage growth throught the growing season. Managing Canadian Thistle by adjusting rest period.
Tuesday October 13 10:30 am	Christopher Baird 12241 Hwy 27 Ferryville, WI	Tillage considerations when establishing pasture in heavily outwintered areas. Reviewing nutrient management plan and soil samples. Increasing fertility over time with minimal commerical fertilizer





Staying Ahead of Tar Spot and White Mold in 2026

Authored by: Damon L. Smith Extension Field Crops Pathologist Department of Plant Pathology, University of Wisconsin–Madison

Introduction

As we move deeper into the growing season, two diseases are back on the radar across Wisconsin and the broader Midwest: tar spot in corn and white mold in soybean. While current pressure is low, both diseases are heavily influenced by weather and crop growth stage, meaning preparation and timely decision-making are key. Here's what you need to know right now.

Tar Spot: Present, but Not Yet a Panic

Tar spot has now been confirmed across several Midwestern states to the south of Wisconsin (Fig. 1). This is very early to find tar spot in the Midwest. The good news is that severity and incidence remain very low, and fungicide applications are not warranted at this time.

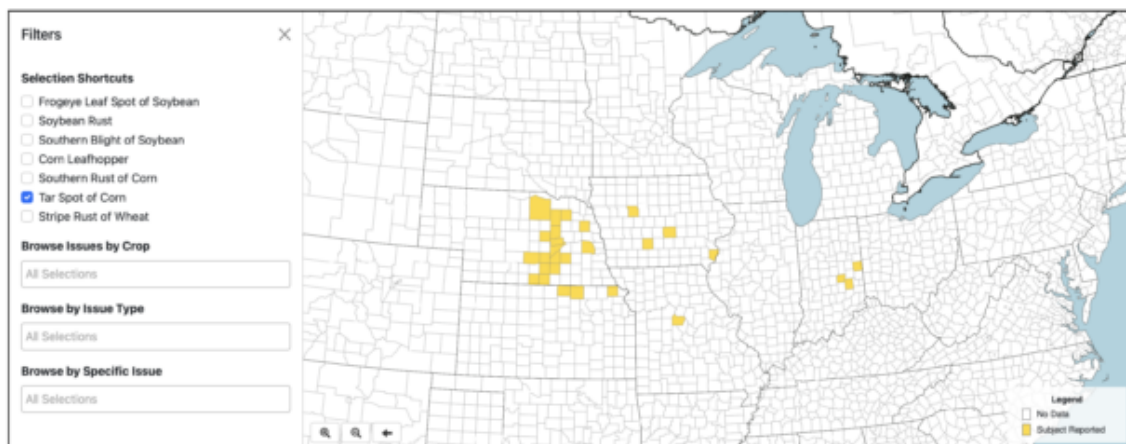
However, tar spot is firmly established in the region, so the focus should be on preparedness rather than reaction.

Crop Lookout



What is Crop Lookout?

Crop Lookout is a real-time, interactive map that highlights emerging field crop issues across the United States and Canada. Updated throughout the growing season by university Extension specialists and research partners, the tool visualizes reports of diseases, pests, and other agronomic challenges as they develop, helping you stay informed and ahead of the curve.

[Submit Report](#)[Contact Team](#)[Latest Bulletins](#)[Report Archive](#)

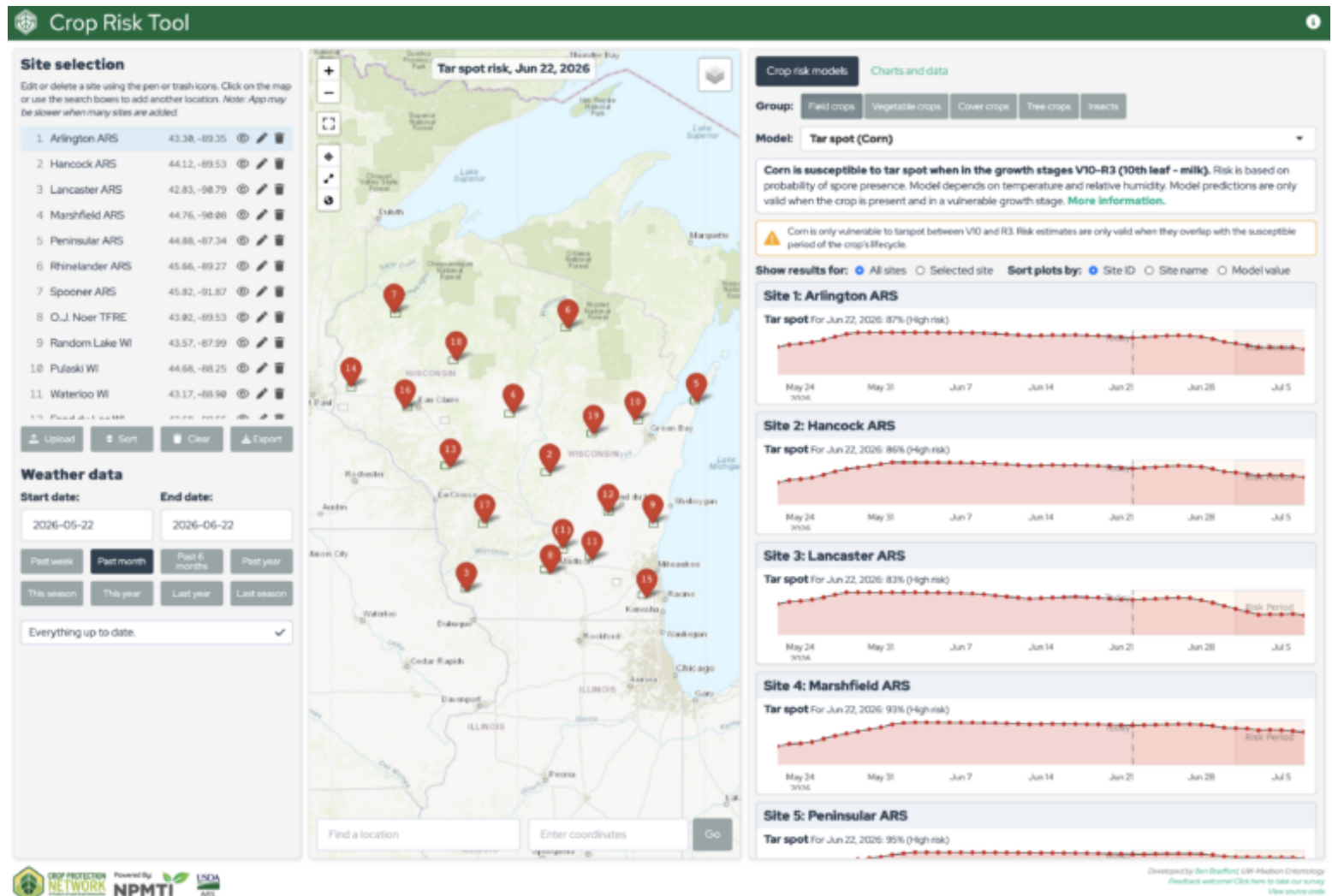
Know Your Risk

The first step is understanding whether tar spot has occurred in your fields before. If it has, assume the pathogen is present locally. Disease risk then depends on the classic “disease triangle”—host, pathogen, and weather.

For tar spot, weather drives risk, especially:

- Intermittent wet/dry cycles
- Leaf wetness (especially overnight)
- High humidity and dew points
- Moderate temperatures

The Crop Protection Network Crop Risk Tool and the Wisconsin Agricultural Forecasting System are decision support tools that can be used to help assess whether conditions have been favorable for disease development. These tools don't detect the pathogen, but they do help determine whether the environment is conducive. Currently the risk for tar spot development is very high across the entire state of Wisconsin (Fig. 2).



Anticipated field challenges

Short answer: No. At this stage, tar spot—if present—is typically confined to lower canopy leaves and at low severity, posing little risk to yield. Yield loss generally isn't observed until severity reaches about 10% on the ear leaf or above. Instead: Scout fields regularly, focus on susceptible hybrids, monitor disease progression in lower leaves, watch the risk models.

Timing Fungicide Applications

If conditions become favorable and disease severity increases, fungicide timing becomes critical.

Key recommendations:

- Avoid applications before V10 in most situations
- Target a single, well-timed spray between VT and R3
- Use products with multiple modes of action (QoI + DMI $\pm$ SDHI) for better efficacy and resistance management

Bottom line: stay ready, but don't rush applications too early

White Mold: Watch the Weather During Bloom

While 2025 saw spotty white mold in soybeans, the 2026 season has been mostly cool and now wet, which are favorable for white mold development.

As soybeans enter the flowering period, attention to weather becomes critical.

Understanding Infection Risk

White mold infects soybean plants through open and senescing flowers, with spores produced by small mushroom-like structures called apothecia.

Risk of infection increases when:

- Weather is cool and moist
- Bloom is prolonged
- Canopies are dense

Cool conditions can create a "double whammy" by promoting fungal development while simultaneously slowing crop growth and extending flowering, increasing infection risk.

Using Prediction Tools

Again, the [Crop Protection Network Crop Risk Tool](#) and the [Wisconsin Agricultural Forecasting](#)

System are decision support tools that can help manage the complexity of determining the risk of infection by the white mold fungus. These models use the following weather variables when the crop canopy has closed to calculate risk:

- Temperature
- Relative humidity
- Wind speed

Currently the white mold risk across Wisconsin is moderate to high (Fig. 3). This means that if the canopy has closed and flowers are present, the risk for infection is high. Fortunately, much of the soybean crop isn't there yet, but we need to be ready.

When to Spray for White Mold

The flowering period (R1–R3) is the critical window for fungicide application.

Key points:

- Best results often occur when applications are made closer to R3 rather than early R1
- Ensure good canopy penetration (higher water volume, slower speeds, adequate pressure)
- Consider products like Endura, Omega, or Cobra based on field history and conditions

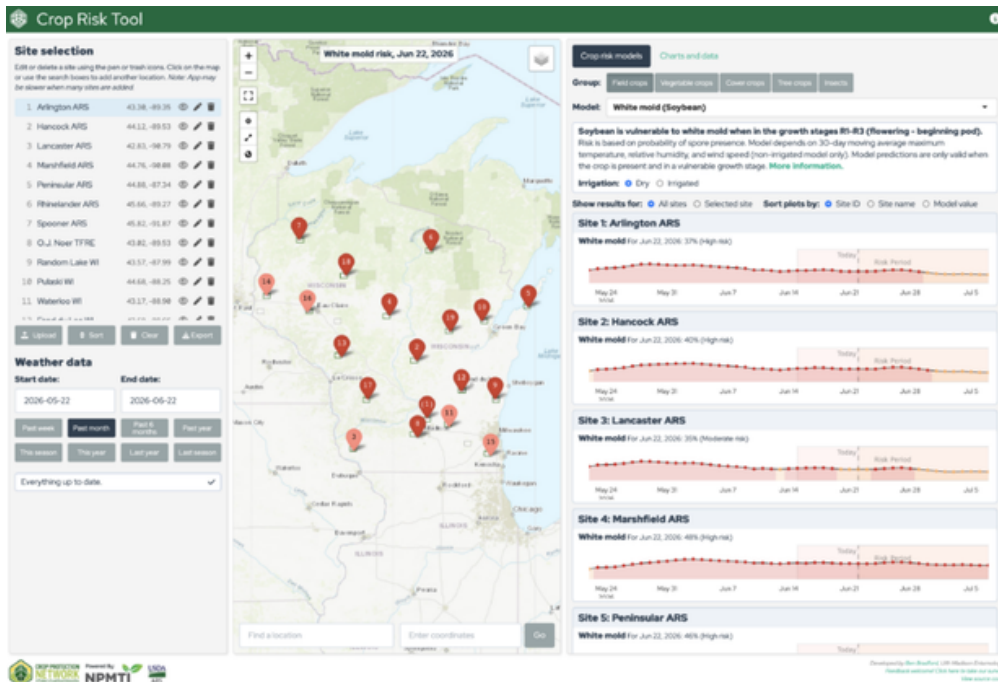
For fields planted with highly susceptible varieties, it may be necessary to act at lower risk thresholds than forecast in the risk tools. For example, a highly susceptible variety might need to be sprayed when risk is considered moderate. What the 7-14 day trends too, if they are rising risk is there for infection.

The Big Picture: Scout, Monitor, Prepare

Both tar spot and white mold are weather-driven diseases that reward proactive management.

Across both crops, the same principles apply:

- Use forecasting tools to understand risk
- Scout fields frequently and deliberately
- Know your field history and hybrid/variety susceptibility



- Time fungicide applications carefully for maximum return

The Fungicide product decision can also be complicated for both diseases. Fortunately, we have sorted through large amounts of fungicide test data from all across the U.S. and developed economic models that have been turned into interactive

calculators. These can be found at the Crop Protection Network and were updated in early 2026. Use these [ROI Calculators](#) to run various scenarios that might fit your farm to determine which products might provide the best return on investment for both of these diseases.

The Take-Home Message

- Tar spot: Present but low—hold off on spraying and continue scouting
- White mold: Risk increasing—watch weather and crop stage closely
- Both tar spot and white mold: Preparation and timing are far more important than reacting too early

Above all—don't panic, but don't ignore the signals. Stay informed, stay flexible, and be ready to act when conditions warrant.



Crossbreeding Can Benefit Cow-calf Producers

William Halfman

Introduction

Crossbreeding is overlooked as a tool that has many benefits for beef producers to improve herd productivity. A well-planned crossbreeding program leads to improvements in both the calf crop and the lifetime of mamma cows compared to straight bred cows.

Heterosis

One of crossbreeding's primary advantages is heterosis, also called hybrid vigor. Heterosis occurs when different breeds are mated together. The greater diversity in genes between the parents, the greater expression of hybrid vigor which is why this is observed when crossing different breeds rather than unrelated or distantly related animals within a breed. This allows the offspring to perform above their parents' average in some traits. Traits that have lower heritability will have greater improvements from hybrid vigor than traits that are highly heritable. Table 1 .

lists example traits and the approximate influence of heterosis. Higher heterosis means greater improvement potential from crossbreeding

Relationship between Heritability and Heterosis

Traits	Heritability	Level of Heterosis
Carcass/end product Skeletal measurements Mature weight	High	Low (0 to 5%)
Growth rate Birth weight Weaning weight Yearling weight	Medium	Medium (5 to 10%)
Maternal ability Reproduction Health Cow longevity Overall cow productivity	Low	High (10 to 30%)

Productivity

Crossbred calves will have heavier weaning weights compared to straight-bred calves, resulting in more pounds of calf to sell. However, for the cow-calf producer, the advantages of using

crossbred cows are even greater. Research that tracked crossbred cows and straight bred cows found that crossbred cows on average tended to remain productive members of the herd for one year longer than straight bred cows. Cow productivity and longevity are important traits for profitability, especially when it takes the average heifer six calves to become profitable from a lifetime profitability standpoint. That means paying back all her development costs in addition to her annual costs to produce a calf each year.

A Well-planned Approach

A good crossbreeding program means a well-planned approach using breeds that complement each other to produce a uniform calf crop. Randomly selecting different breeds of bulls or cows over time is not a well-planned approach and can be detrimental to the quality and uniformity of the calf crop. There are different approaches to a well thought out plan that can work for producers of all sizes. Maximum heterosis is achieved when three different breeds are used in a planned manner. Using two breeds will result in approximately 67% of the heterosis that the three-breed approach will yield, which is still an improvement.

Crossbreeding Program Examples

Some crossbreeding programs are simple, while others are more complex and require more record keeping to match females to the correct bull breed. For example, a two-breed terminal cross program where heifers are not retained requires minimal tracking. A three-breed program where heifers are retained maximizes the benefits of heterosis, but requires more tracking and planning. A few examples of crossbreed programs include:

- Using artificial insemination to breed cows to complementary breeds. Using an estrous synchronization program and sexed semen can even help get early born heifers as a potential replacement pool.
- Purchasing crossbred replacement heifers of known consistent breeds and using a bull of a third breed.
- Larger herds that use multiple bulls, with a little record keeping, can group cows accordingly and put them out with the breed of bull that will optimize crossbreeding.
- There are plans for small, one bull herds, that want to raise their own replacements using a planned rotation of bull breeds that will result in capturing some hybrid vigor over time.

Summary

Crossbreeding is an underutilized tool that can yield positive results for beef cow-calf producers. Evaluate your operation and determine if you can take advantage of what hybrid vigor can do for you.

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Importance of Forage Growth Stages When Grazing Cattle

Beth
McIlquham

Introduction

Grazing cattle sounds so simple. The forage grows, the cattle eat the forage, and it all ends with a “happily ever after.” Unfortunately, it's not as simple as it sounds. To maximize cattle performance while grazing, producers must pay attention to the forage itself and how it can affect the grazing animals.

Growth Stages of Forage

To begin, let's break down forage growth into three stages. Understanding these is the first step in attaining effective grazing management. The three growth stages of forage are:

- Stage One: The plant must have time to rest and regrow. While in this stage, plants use carbohydrates that are stored in the roots to promote growth. This stage occurs right after grazing or clipping and can also occur when coming out of dormancy in the spring or with newly emerging grasses.
- Stage Two: The plant's quality maximizes. Effective grazing

- management extends this phase as long as possible. Here, the plant has enough leaf surface area for photosynthesis, allowing it to grow without using carbohydrate reserves in the root.
- Stage Three: The plant begins reproduction and will start to set seed. At this point, the plant's yield will be higher than ever, but the quality is low because of the higher fiber concentrations, lower crude protein, and higher stem-to-leaf ratios.

How Forage Growth Stages Influence Cattle

When cattle nutrition requirements aren't met, performance is hindered, and profits are lost. Grazing cattle may need to be supplemented with additional feed to meet energy and nutrient needs when forage quality is poor or in short supply. When the quality of the forage is adequate, supplementation may not be needed, aside from mineral, and can help reduce production costs. Forage in stage two is ideal because it is more

efficiently digested by the rumen. The higher forage quality results in maximum intake, which increases performance in the herd.

Forage in stage three is less ideal for grazing cattle because the fiber content is high and quality is lower, which slows digestion in the rumen and reduces available energy. Therefore, cattle will consume less, and their performance will decrease. Lastly, stage one is not ideal because when the grass is too short, cattle will struggle to consume enough forage to perform. Remember, cattle graze by wrapping their tongue around the grass and ripping it. In grazing situations where the grass is too short, it will be difficult for cattle to consume sufficient forage. Grazing forages too early and too short also stresses the plants and reduces long term productivity of the stand. Figure 1 provides a visual summary of how forage growth stages can influence cattle.

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Forage Growth Stage			
How the Stage Influences Cattle	Cattle performance will decrease due to the low forage quantity and struggle to eat such short grasses due to their grazing style.	Cattle performance will be highest here! Forage quality is at it's highest and cattle will get the most efficient use out of your pastures.	Cattle will reduce intake due to high fiber contents in the plant. The rumen digests this slower, leading to decreased performance.

Other Benefits of Effective Grazing Management Strategies

Creating resilient plants is one of the largest benefits of effective grazing management. The best way to do this is to maintain energy reserves, often stored in the roots of plants. After cattle graze, the plant must use its stored energy to grow until the surface area of the leaves is large enough to photosynthesize enough energy

on its own. If a plant does not have enough energy in the root reserves to grow, it will become stressed, weak, and die. Overgrazing can deplete the root energy reserves to a point where individual forage species struggle to persist, and entire pastures are left vulnerable to environmental stressors, such as extreme weather. Over time, the composition of stressed pastures will shift toward a lower quality forage, further perpetuating the problem. Managing to avoid overgrazing maintains high-quality forage for the long term.

Once you've fostered resilient plants through effective grazing management, some other benefits you will see include:

- Increased forage utilization
- More forage to be harvested for extreme weather months
- Maximized efficiency of pastures
- Better distribution of urine and manure

Summary

In the end, grazing management can help your cattle achieve maximum performance, increase the efficiency of your pastures, and, ideally, improve your bottom line. The best way to begin is to introduce short grazing periods and long periods of rest on your pastures. Utilizing a rotational-type grazing management strategy is one of the most common ways to do this. Although grazing cattle efficiently takes management and preparation, it just may lead to that “happily ever after.”

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Cutting Edge



The Cutting Edge Podcast Episode #56: Saffron Production and Marketing

Written by **STEFFEN MIRSKY**: A part of the **The Cutting Edge Podcast** program

A conversation with Dr. Margaret Skinner, Research Professor and Extension Entomologist, and Dr. Richard Bamford, Research Scientist, of the University of Vermont about growing and marketing saffron. Resources North American Center for Saffron Research & Development – University of Vermont

Listen Here:

<https://cropsandsoils.extension.wisc.edu/articles/the-cutting-edge-podcast-episode-56-saffron-production-and-marketing/>

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