

Thanks to the abundance of rain that our area has received the past several weeks, many producers are seeing positive changes on their ranches by way of increased quantity and quality of their forages. This improved forage provides ranchers with an opportunity to save money on winter feeding costs and take advantage of what is available. This week we will discuss the benefits of standing forage, and how to best utilize this resource.

Standing, or stockpiled, forage occurs when plant growth is allowed to accumulate in the field, generally in the fall, for grazing during the late fall and winter. This type of forage is beneficial because it allows the producer to efficiently utilize his resources without spending more money on winter feed cost than necessary. That is, implementation provides an opportunity to lower annual cow cost, which in turn increases the profitability of his operation. A study done by Oklahoma State University revealed that “producers should expect similar performance of growing cattle grazing fertilized, stockpiled bermudagrass pasture compared to cattle consuming bermudagrass hay”. This shows that not only is stockpiling a typically cheaper feeding method, it provides the same results that may be expected if the cattle were only provided hay.

If you have excess grass available for grazing, it is important to thoroughly consider your plan for grazing management before you turn your cattle out on the pasture. If properly utilized, stockpiled bermudagrass can provide the required nutrition for dry pregnant cows through January. The most effective way to graze standing forage is by rotational or strip-grazing. These types of grazing reduce the amount of waste, and therefore help to extend the grazing period. This extended grazing period results in a shortened length of hay feeding season. If you have standing forage available, we recommend that you allow your cattle to consume all of it before you feed them any hay. You should not put out any hay until either all of the standing forage has been consumed, or the cows begin calving. This is due to the fact that nutrient requirements of a cow increase at parturition and the standing forage alone is likely not high enough in protein to meet the nutrient requirements of the cattle.

If properly implemented, standing forage utilization can greatly assist the producer in being more profitable and efficient. Standing forage also presents producers with a cheaper alternative to feeding hay. If you have any questions about the types of grazing systems above, or would like to learn more about how to implement standing forage in your operation, please contact us. Refer to the following link to read the OSU’s complete research article about managing bermudagrass pasture:  
<http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-5674/ANSI-3035web.pdf>