



SPRING '26

NPFA UPDATE

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM THE
NORTHERN PLAINS FORAGE ASSOCIATION

WHO ARE WE?

NPFA is a grassroots association open to forage growers, buyers, industry partners, and anyone with an interest in forages. We are creating a networking and education group focused on annual forages/cover crops, alfalfa, silage, grazing systems, and more!

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WHERE TO FIND US



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THE GRAZING PLAN FOR YOUR CROPLAND

BY JUSTIN FRUECHTE, RENOVO



As cattle markets strengthen and crop margins tighten, many producers are rethinking how cropland fits into their overall operation. Grazing annual forages on cropland offers a flexible, short-term strategy to extend the grazing season, reduce feed costs, and improve soil health without committing land to permanent pasture. When designed intentionally, annual forage grazing can generate immediate returns while setting the field up for long-term productivity.

Not all cropland is equally suited for grazing. Fields with good drainage, manageable slopes, and access to water perform best. Temporary fencing makes it possible to subdivide fields into small paddocks, improving forage utilization and manure distribution. Dividing the field into cool-season and warm-season forage acres is a practical way to maintain consistent forage quality throughout the grazing season. A roughly equal split works well in most regions, though acreage can be adjusted based on climate and livestock demand.

Cool-season annuals provide early spring and fall grazing. A diverse mix of forage oats, forage barley, and triticale helps spread maturity dates and reduce risk. Adding high-yielding legumes such as forage peas and lentils improves forage quality while contributing nitrogen. Fast-establishing brassicas like forage rape, kale, or swede round out the mix by adding palatability, frost tolerance, and digestible protein.

TIME FOR DUES RENEWAL



If you haven't renewed your dues yet, please visit <https://npforage.com/become-a-member.html> or scan the code below to renew and provide feedback. Your support of this organization is what keeps it going.- we want to hear from you! Thank you for your continued support.



THE GRAZING PLAN FOR YOUR CROPLAND CONT'D

Warm season annuals address the summer grazing slump and extend grazing into the fall. Blends of millet and BMR sorghum sudangrass hybrids provide exceptional yield. Most importantly they love the heat and are very drought-tolerant, making them great to hedge weather conditions. These need to be planted slightly later than your cool season paddocks, make sure your soil temperatures are at least sixty degrees Fahrenheit before planting. Other warm season options can include forage soybeans, cow peas, or mung beans. These all add quality like other legumes in a blend.

Annual forages should not be grazed too early. Cool-season species are typically ready at 8-12 inches of growth, while warm-season grasses should reach 18-24 inches. Brassicas benefit from at least 60 days of growth before grazing. Targeting a utilization rate of 50-65 percent protects regrowth and soil cover. Rotational or strip grazing allows livestock to harvest forage evenly while leaving adequate residue behind. Frequent moves—often daily or every few days—maximize intake efficiency and prevent selective grazing.

These forage systems commonly produce 6-8 tons of forage per acre as-fed. At a conservative utilization rate, roughly 8,000 to 9,000 pounds per acre are consumed. Cow-calf pairs typically consume about 2.5 percent of body weight daily, making it possible to support high stocking densities for short grazing periods. You will undoubtedly make in season adjustments due to weather conditions and movement times. Be nimble with your pasture layout, and let cow and plant performance teach you when to move through paddocks.

Grazing annual forages on cropland with cattle is a much better alternative to many cash crops this season. The system offers strong short-term returns when cattle prices are favorable and long-term soil health benefits that pay dividends for years to come. With thoughtful planning and management, cropland can become a powerful grazing resource working just as hard for livestock as it does for crops.



SDSU WELCOMES NEW FORAGE FIELD SPECIALIST, KIM RICARDO

Hi everyone, my name is Kim Ricardo, and I am the new Forage Field Specialist with SDSU Extension, based at the Pierre Regional Center. I am originally from central Missouri, where I grew up on a commercial cow-calf operation that has since expanded to include a commercial sheep enterprise. My background in livestock production is what sparked my interest in forage systems and grazing management, and I am excited to bring that experience to my new role in South Dakota.

I earned my Master of Science in Animal Sciences from the University of Missouri in December 2025, and my Extension program will focus on supporting South Dakota producers through improved forage productivity and grazing management. In my role, I work closely with livestock producers, land managers, and agricultural professionals to address forage production, utilization, and grazing management challenges across the state.

My work emphasizes applied education and field-based research tailored to South Dakota's diverse forage systems. Program focus areas include pasture and hay management, forage quality, grazing system design, multispecies grazing systems, and strategies to improve forage resiliency under variable weather conditions. I am especially interested in helping producers adapt management practices that improve efficiency while also supporting long-term sustainability.

South Dakota forage systems face ongoing challenges related to weather variability, input costs, and grazing pressure. Through my Extension work, I aim to help producers navigate these challenges by identifying management strategies that are practical, research-driven, and adaptable to real-world conditions. I am looking forward to building strong relationships with producers and industry partners to develop solutions that enhance resilience, profitability, and long-term success across the state.

If you are interested in learning more or collaborating with me, you can contact me directly at:

Phone: (605) 773-8120

Email: kimberly.ricardo@sdstate.edu

BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: MIKE BARBER

My grandparents settled in Southeast South Dakota, and all were involved in agriculture. My parents were schoolteachers at Rock Rapids, IA and that's where I spent my formative years. I graduated from Iowa State in 1985 and went on to earn a graduate degree in orthotics and prosthetics from Northwestern Med School in Chicago. I settled in Sioux Falls and built a successful O & P business.

After a couple of decades fixing broken people, I switched gears and with the help of my eldest boys resurrected my Grandpa Johnson's farm near Garretson. We now have a cow calf operation and farm about 2000 acres. The farm provides a steady income for the boys, but I needed a different career. Spurred on by my lack of agronomic knowledge I borrowed a lot of money and started a soil testing lab. I survived that business and am now the proud manager of a Rock River Lab, testing Feed and Forages. The rate of gain at our family feedlot continues to improve. I've made many new friends in the animal nutrition industry and look forward to helping the Northern Plains Forage Association grow and mature.

My favorite distraction is water. I collect old boats and I like sailing. I enjoy tweaking the rigging and the sails and watching the corresponding increase in speed. The only thing more fun than blasting through the waves on a Hobie Cat is launching the grand kids off a tube after hitting a perfectly timed swell. And I hate fishing.

Photo by Janelle Ateyo with Tri State Neighbor; https://agupdate.com/tristateneighbor/livestock/bef/article_792a015a-0415-11f0-869f-6bc12bb26e2b.html



IT'S HAY SEASON!

QUALITY SAMPLING YIELDS QUALITY RESULTS

BY: SCOTT FLEMING WITH ROCK RIVER LAB, INC.

While many folks are finalizing their Memorial Day plans, alfalfa growers have something very different on their minds. Accurately timing the harvest of an alfalfa crop is critical, especially first crop. Most forage producers know the key to timing harvest appropriately is by accurately sampling your crop prior to or at harvest. It's been a while since harvesting - now is a good time to brush up on accurate sampling methodology.

Samples should be pulled from the same representative area each time. The University of Wisconsin recommends sticking to a half-acre area each time you sample. They also recommend that two sub samples be pulled from each field.

Mimicking cutting height is the next step to achieving a top-quality sample. Hand-clipped samples should be harvested at a height similar to that of the mechanical harvester that will soon follow. This is generally two to three inches above the soil surface.

Many people have the misconception that submitting a large sample to the forage analysis laboratory will get them more accurate results. When in actuality, a large sample can not be handled by the laboratory, and therefore must be sub sampled. Instead, collect an accurate, appropriately sized sample in the field. The best size sample for submitting to the laboratory is about a half pound of fresh material. This is approximately six half plants or a softball-sized ball of material.

Samples should be placed in a paper or vented Tyvek bag. Samples should NEVER be placed in a plastic bag. This will lead to near immediate sample decay and an inaccurate analysis value. Ship or deliver samples to the forage testing laboratory efficiently, and avoid shipping samples over holidays or weekends when sample delivery could be delayed.

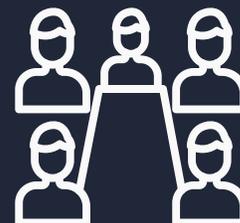
We wish everyone a successful first crop and beyond!

Original Article: <https://rockriverlab.com/pages/Hay-Season-Sampling-Tips.php>



CURRENT NPFA BOARD MEMBERS

- President: Jeff Jackson, Croplan Alfalfa and Forage Specialist/ Forage Producer
- Vice President: David Elliot, Drumgoon Dairy, Lake Norden, SD
- Treasurer: Mark Rogen, Boadwine Farms, Baltic, SD
- Justin Fruechte, Renovo Seed, Director of Sales/ Forage Producer
- Paul Hahn, Arkansas Valley Seed, Outside Sales Manager
- Eric Tieszen, producer, Canistota, SD
- Al Lenhart, KWS Cereals Regional Sales Rep/ Forage Producer
- David Skaggs, Agrovive Biologicals, Dairy Product Manager
- Aaron Swanson, Forage Producer, Lake Norden, SD
- Colin Geppert, Forage Producer/ Sales Account Manager, Hubbard Feeds
- Mike Barber, Rock River Lab, Inc./ Forage Producer



**THE CENTRAL PLAINS DAIRY EXPO IS THIS WEEK!
3/17-3/19 IN SIOUX FALLS**

*Come find us at tabletop Q or engage with our members speaking at
breakouts!*

Get more info: www.centralplainsdairy.com/

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

More Forage:
Less Input and Managing Fall Harvest Stress

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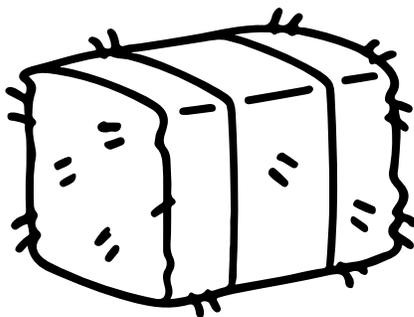
LAND O'LAKES, INC.



With **Jeff Jackson**
Forage Specialist | CROPLAN – Land O'Lakes

SESSION DESCRIPTION:

Are there ways of producing more digestible fiber/forage in our systems while reducing our cost per pound of feed fed? Look at some ideas to use alternative practices and forages to achieve that goal. Making a large pile of fiber at a low cost and adjusting the energy of the total mixed ration (TMR) with local inputs will be an advantage. While we look at some transition in harvested product to make that pile of fiber, can we also take some harvest pressure off of the crew in the fall to have a better balance of time and energy?



The Alfalfa Advantage:
What Smart Field Decisions Mean
for Your Bottom Line

With:



Moderator
Erika Rodbell
Forage Research Agronomist
Forage Genetics International

SPONSORED BY:



Panelist
Sara Bauder
Forage Field Specialist
South Dakota State
University Extension



Panelist
Greg Moes
Dairy Producer
MoDak Dairy



Panelist
Dan Funke
Forage Producer
Funke Farms

MEET OUR ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Being a new, grassroots organization, we have relied heavily on sponsorships, goodwill, volunteers, and associate members. We would like to specifically recognize our associate members who have gone above and beyond to support the Northern Plains Forage Association in its infancy! If you would like to see your business or operation listed here- contact us!



UPCOMING REGIONAL FORAGE-RELATED EVENTS

- **Central Plains Dairy Expo;** March 17-19 @ Sioux Falls, SD
- **SD Grasslands Coalition Grazing Schools;** June 16-18, Sept. 9-11 @ Wall, Summit, and Chamberlain, SD
- **West River SD Soil Health School;** June 24-25 @ Caputa, SD
- **Forage Field Day (hosted by UMN, ISU, SDSU, UNL, NPFA, and I-29 Moo-U) ;** Date TBD @ the West Central Research and Outreach Center @ Morris, MN

***This is the best list available at time of publication- if you would like a forage-related event listed here, please contact Sara Bauder at**