

Testimonials for Learning about the grazing charts and plotting out a grazing season in small groups

Grazing Chart Rollout Staff Training

Troy Bishopp, facilitator

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USDA Service Center

Norwich, NY

First reactions:

- This tool permits/simplifies/helps you to think along lines you traditionally haven't; break through mental block(s) & view the grazing system from a different and fresh perspective.
- It also brings out important considerations more vividly; puts them all out to "see" at once & aids in prioritizing among them.

Subsequent reactions:

- Allows us to shift away from mere crisis based approach to managing pastures to a more thoughtfully include perspective which accounts for multiple needs.
- While there are many variables that come into play for determining actual forage production and livestock performance, this process helps us to focus on those we can significantly influence to maximize desired outcome of our efforts and resources.
- Using the grazing chart emphasizes importance of efficient use of time and making tasks 'fit' into a realistic schedule.
- This type of planning and critiquing previous season's experiences points out the value of correctly (& honestly) identifying the "bottleneck" - that part of the operation which can limit further progress if not acknowledged and resolved.
- Emphasizes contingency forecasting to continue offering cheap forage (relative to traditional options normally selected) even in the face of emergencies and adversities.
- Exploring options not normally considered which expands the possibilities for management

Greatly helps to comprehensively visualize patterns, glitches in past years, and recognize possibilities for future improvements.

- Prompts you to keep primary objectives in the forefront of your mind - ensuring adequate volumes of quality forage in front of the animals with the least stress (for farmer & livestock) and applying cost-effective inputs based on the vision for the operation.
- Also causes us to re-evaluate earlier assumptions and even question certain initial goals

Use of the grazing chart for farmers & other TA professionals:

- Encourage use of some reasonably accurate method (you chose) for estimating actual forage production & consumption from pasture, and putting the findings into the grazing chart.
- Also including other notable meteorological details such as precipitation, high/low air temps, wind, cloud cover, ...
- Don't forget jotting down dates for other milestones along the season, both intended like forage harvest, clipping, fertilizer & lime applications, seedings, soil conditioning (e.g., Aerway), and accidental events like pugging, overgrazing, forage becoming over mature.
- Hang or have chart in a convenient site that grazier with regularly frequents during the grazing season to make it easier for to consistently make entries as they are fresh in the mind.
- Suggest the grazier employ a pocket notebook to jot down any significant conditions, events, or other observations for transfer to the chart later on.
- Suggest graziers attempt to think of the grazing system with multiple interactions and attempt to understand how each plays a part on the overall performance of the forage base and animal performance.

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- 1) learned that the chart can be much more than a diary of the years grazing - it is a great planning tool and visual aid to work through goals & issues regarding the grazing system/season
 - 2) it was great to see how the chart can work with real-life examples and to see how it can make the farmer think about management and help them make decisions or see things they might not see/think about without the chart
 - 3) the visual aspect of the chart was good to see where there were options or where changes could be made

I see the chart being a good one-on-one exercise with producers as well as something that could be discussed/taught to a small group of producers. I think it will be a more useful tool for farmers that have been grazing for a few years and have a working understanding of their grazing system but could also be a good tool for new graziers to visually show them how their plan might play out over the season (and then they can use the chart to track how it actually worked out). Even experience graziers will find it useful - just another way to increase their management skills.

I see this being an immediate training opportunity for planners in our office. I see it as a perfect tool to help educate farmers and be a part of the focused "increased management assistance" protocol here in the Watershed. I will be writing it into the outline of assistance for that new protocol.

Dan Vredenburg, Conservation Planner

Troy! Thanks for the grazing chart training. I plan to use it with Issac in the near future. It should be fun and educational. A couple of chart quotes come to mind. "The chart brings the grazing plan to life. The farmer and planner can see how the rotational grazing plan will work". "Planning with the chart gives you a picture of the grazing season to come, and will serve as a tool to assess success and failures of the grazing season past". Bob Weaver, Otsego SWCD

Hi Troy, Thanks for the grazing chart training this morning in Cortland SWCD office. I think going through the planning process with the grazing charts is a great way to help recognize and understand how resting the pasture for appropriate intervals during the season is an important key to successful grazing. Your training got me to think how the NRCS rotational grazing plan is implemented on the farm by the grazer in a very practical ways by asking the 'right' questions.

1. I understood 'planning backwards' from critical dates, like a vacation, can really help implement successful grazing earlier in the season to prepare for these important times.
2. Identifying 'Decision points' during the season like 1st & 2nd cutting dates - when to graze the hay reserve paddocks, which can be prepared for by scheduling in advance for greatest effectiveness.
3. 'Rules of Thumb' that help a grazer interpret a pasture sward he is seeing in the paddock into estimated dry matter content for his animal's daily needs.
4. How to realistically plan 60 days ahead of the frost date for late season 'stockpile' grazing and to prepare the pasture for a strong yield next year with adequate rest.

I liked the idea of new grazers tracking their season on the chart which sets the stage to making planning decisions for the following years. Eric J. Jensen, CCA Resource Conservation Specialist, Skaneateles Lake Watershed Ag Program, Onondaga County Soil & Water Conservation District

Troy, After sitting through the grazing chart training yesterday, I can really see how the chart can be used to translate a farm's grazing plan into a "farmer friendly", easy to read and follow grazing schedule. Let's face it, AEM 3A plans can be overwhelming with the sheer volume of information that they contain. This chart helps condense that information into one sheet that everyone on the farm can follow. Thanks for the training opportunity and for sharing the chart and truly explaining how it can be used to its best advantage. Stacy Russell, Cortland Co. SWCD

I liked the idea that this is bringing the AEM 3A plan to life. I think it will be especially helpful to farmers using a 3A plan for the first time. However, I think this is an important tool to help the farm family as it helps them to include non-farm activities into their planning and gives both the farm help and spouses something to go off of in case there is an illness (or worse). I think that training technicians will be a key component because personality is key to leading farmers through this planning process. To that end I think that there is the potential to develop some sort of software that Districts or extension agents could use to go through a series of questions with the farmer that would spit out a calendar for them. This is not the highest priority obviously but might help technicians who don't have the skills that the people that were in the room yesterday have and it may speed up the process (just a thought). I think it might be more acceptable to a farmer if they began using it like a diary and then eventually the light bulb would click on that this could be used to plan to the future, not just document the past. It seems as though in many cases you have to work forwards first even if it means erasing because you need to really visualize the management on your farm in a simple way before you make it more complicated (working backwards). If time permits it may be good to create a few different scenarios for planning like –“Wet”, “Normal”, and “Dry” but without that time, best to shoot for “Normal”.

Thanks for taking the time to do that yesterday.

Aaron Ristow, Upper Susquehanna Coalition Ag. Coordinator

I am getting excited about summarizing the grazing chart. I can see already that it is and will become a huge management tool that we will implement more and more on our grass farm. I want to thank you, Troy, for your effort in introducing this idea to us and making these charts available for their use this season. There is no question in my mind--- these charts are a real winner. This thanks has been a long time in coming. Not because I did not see the value in it at the start, for I did. But I did want to give it a season of use to make a full assessment of its usefulness. I now know the chart is more useful than I expected and I also know we have not reached the limits on what it can do for us. Nathan Weaver, Madison Co. Dairy Farmer

1. First and foremost just how to converse with the farmers about grazing and how the farm is managed. Asking the right questions and how to go about asking them is invaluable. Each farm is different, and being able to adapt and steer the farmers in the right direction is a skill that I feel more comfortable with after each meeting I have been to of Troy's.

2. Planning at the end of the grazing for the beginning of the next is something that can easily be overlooked, but it is another thing that really sets a date and a place to work from for the farmer.

Thanks Troy. It has been a lot of fun learning about this, and a great motivator for getting to fields and helping anyway we can. Nate Townsend, Conservation Planner, Watershed Agricultural Council

John and I really appreciate the time you spent working with us on the chart. I'd like to use it for a season before I write a really glowing testimonial, but I can say already that it is forcing us to PLAN this year's grazing. Yeah, I know that was the idea, but we really are doing it. We have been at this for a long time and have become a bit nonchalant about how we do it - even if we have run out of grass sooner than we had wanted. We have also had some fun with the chart - I had to explain to my son Jake how EFD =SS. Empire Farm Days means Start Stockpiling. Your explanations made me much less intimidated by all those empty boxes (what if I do it wrong?!) Use a pencil and I just bought a big eraser. Means I'll use the chart, not just whine that I don't know how. While we all want to be successful and graze through Christmas or whatever, I think the chart will be very useful in showing where things went wrong, helping us learn from our mistakes. Learning how to maximize this ecologically and economically sustainable product - fresh green grass - is key to the sustainability of agriculture in this region.

We just had three inches of rain since Saturday and our big green sponges of pastures soaked it all up. One group of heifers is out on grass and I hope to have the other group very soon.

Thanks and Happy Grazing, Sally Fairbairn

Troy, first of all, I have a better understanding of how the chart works by watching you go through it with a real life situation! I love how it takes into account life and that it is vital to plan around those things that are important to our families. Flexibility is built into it, while providing guidelines for the season. What a great way to see it put to use while bantering back and forth with the farmer and those in attendance. These served to trigger questions and other thoughts that were important to discuss and consider. *Helen A. Terry, GLCI Grazing Advocate, Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Genesee, Livingston, & Wyoming Counties.*

Hey Troy, finally getting back to ya. The pasture session - was excellent. Your right it makes ya think from another better angle. I've been using it since the meeting. One thing it brings out kinda quick is the yields of each paddock. Shows ya what fields need improvement I believe this is a must have tool for anyone grazing cattle. Almost like a bird's eye view of your whole pasture layout and plan. Thank you and keep up the good work ~ Rob Hudyncia

Troy- Thanks so much for making the trek out here to the hills of Allegany County for the Grazing Chart Training ! It was amazing for me, to watch the transformation in the room, as they worked with you to make the chart fit a practical application. Everyone was engaged, and dare I say, enthralled...as they watched the chart come ALIVE. You truly transformed an overwhelming 3A plan, full of technical information, and blanket forms, into a personal, understandable, tool. Thank you!

Scott Alsworth, AEM Planner Allegany County SWCD

I began the learning part of the weekend in a half-day session with “The Grass Whisperer“, Troy Bishopp. As an experienced and knowledgeable grazer, Troy’s talk was centered around using an appropriate grazing rotation to best serve the needs of the farmer, the animals and the earth beneath the grass. Before he got into the details, however, Troy spent quite a bit of time emphasizing the importance of developing goals as a family; whether that family was a seasoned, large multi-generational farming family, or a young couple just starting out. He stressed the importance of identifying goals and writing a statement that outlined the why in a family’s journey toward those goals, and that goals should probably include more than just the bottom line (money) if happiness and joy along that journey was desired.

At first, I was impatient as Troy shared these thoughts, and wondered when he would get into the “real” tips I could implement – how big to make grazing pastures, when to move animals, how to fence for frequent rotations, etc (he did eventually get to some of these) but eventually the impatience subsided and I began to really listen. Much like getting into a really moving song or a good piece of art gives me a little chill, the thought of family farming got to me. So far, farming for us has meant me leaving early in the morning to go to someone else’s farm to care for my animals, or care for my chickens while my kids play in the yard. Sometimes, more and more lately, my four year old joins me but usually my “farming” is a solitary endeavor. Listening to Troy, I realized that if I want to make our farm part of our home and our family life, it has to be the result of a collective vision and shared goals – not my “hobby” imposed on the rest of my family (while they willingly and generously support me, for this to work they need to share the passion). I’m still not sure how to put this into action in my own situation, but I have certainly been thinking a lot about it and think it is an idea that may be applied to a lot more than farming. Unification, or at least better communication sometimes seems like a lofty idea, but if it leads to more peace, happiness and goal achievement, I’m beginning to think that Troy is right and it is worth the work it might take to get there. Liz Russell