

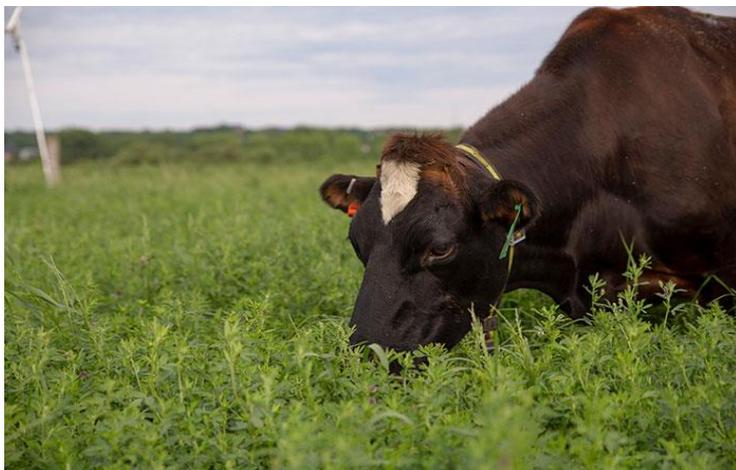
## Update #5 – Finally something for the cattleman!

As harvest begins to wind down for the season, winter grazing is starting to ramp up. Many producers are looking to fields of cornstalks as a forage source for their herds. But aside from cornstalks, can fields of dormant alfalfa be grazed as well?

Around this time, cornstalks are usually ready to be grazed, and it would be convenient to include a neighboring alfalfa field to provide extra grazing and as a source of protein.

Typically, the alfalfa is still green even though it has endured several nights of low temperatures. Some wilting and yellowing may be present, but most of the leaves are still attached to the stem.

A logical question may be “Can I be sure my cows won’t bloat and die if they graze my alfalfa?” According to Bruce Anderson, extension forage specialist from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln every situation is different. “To be quite honest, you can never be 100 percent certain that alfalfa won’t cause bloat,” he reiterates.



According to Anderson, the answer to the question of if alfalfa is safe to graze is, “probably.” The risk of bloat drops a week after a hard freeze, but good husbandry methods can reduce the risk further. Wait until mid-day after the frost and dew are gone and make sure cows are full before turning them out to alfalfa. Provide a dry and palatable feed to supplement cows grazing alfalfa and consider using a bloat retardant. Anderson also recommends keeping a close eye on the cows for the first few days. “Alfalfa can be grazed safely; just be careful and realistic,” Anderson concludes.

## Are Clovers Worth Including in the Pasture?

One of the best summaries of the benefits of clover in grass pastures was presented 33 years ago by forage scientists Joe Burns and J.E. Standaert at an international workshop. Burns a forage agronomist with the USDA ARS in Raleigh N.C. and Standaert, an economist at North Carolina State University summarized 38 different research reports from 19 states. I am going to summarize the results. In these reports there were 42 experiments where there was a direct comparison of beef cattle weight gains between a grass plus legume pasture and a pure grass pasture with N fertilizer applied. Of those trials 90% reported improved average daily gains for the beef cattle in the mixed legume-grass pasture compared to the monoculture grass. The average boost in Average Daily Gain was 18%.

In the 38 studies reporting total gain per acre, the grass plus clover pastures also produced 18% more beef per acre on average. However, the enhanced gain per acre was much more variable and not reliable. Only half of the studies resulted in a real improvement in beef productivity per acre, 27% resulted in no difference and 23% resulted in a significant drop in gain per acre.

The study went on to say the selection of the right grass and clover combination make a difference. The grass plus clover tends to be riskier in regions with more variable rainfall, poorer soil conditions and hotter and more subtropical weather. The clover can fill in holes in the grass and reduce weed competition, which is hard to measure.

The alternative to growing clover is the use of Nitrogen fertilizer. There is a cost associated with this also. The study concluded that clover used in pastures in cooler climates have a better chance of success than in warmer climates. The use of Nitrogen in place of clover is most successful in circumstance where N costs are lower rather than higher.

Mixtures of grass and clover generally enhance individual animal performance and usually sustain animal productivity per acre at levels that are similar to or slightly better than grass pastures fertilized with N. The economics of using grass plus clover pastures varies from site to site, but the chances of profitable clover use

are greatest when growing cool-season pastures, a stand life of three or more years is expected, and N prices are moderate to high.



Are clovers worth it? Usually, but not always.

**The Importance of Zinc** – Most soil testing labs will express the amount of Zinc in your soil in ppm or parts per million. In relation to your phosphorus the optimum ratio should be 10:1 or about 2 to 3 ppm. Just briefly, the cost of dry is usually cheaper than liquid and Zinc Sulfate is more available immediately. Zinc does not move well in the soil. For example 60 bu. winter wheat will remove .32 lbs. of Zinc. It does not mineralize that fast in our lower organic matter soils, so adding some makes sense. Balanced nutrition is essential. Too much phos means Zinc should be

higher. Those of you using MESZ are on the right track. Considering a base line of zero in the soil when you begin, 10 lbs. of MESZ product will give you 18.4 lbs. of usable phosphate. At a 10:1 ideal ratio then 1.8 lbs. of usable Zinc would be the perfect compliment. Remember not everything we apply is usable so hedging on the higher side is wise for optimal soil health. If you want to educate yourself further, look up Mulder's Chart. It outlines the inter-reactions of most all nutritional elements from the perspective of being either complimentary or antagonistic. It is a wonderful reference. **Warning**, it can be confusing, just take your time and focus on one elemental reaction at a time.

If you know of someone who would like to receive the updates, please forward their email address to me at [dana@tristatseed.com](mailto:dana@tristatseed.com). Happy Thanksgiving!