

# My Top 5 Forage Improvements/Practices

## Stocker

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Producer

The top forage practices that work for me on my farm begin with the realization and acceptance *that I'm in the grass business first and the cattle business second*. I haven't always embraced the value of this concept and neither have most cattle farmers. For example, how many farmers consider pasture production as their highest priority? How many of them even consider their pasture as a high priority crop, or even a crop? Consider the membership totals of KCA – nearly 10,000 members, while membership in the KY Forage and Grassland Council is less than 100. The single most unappreciated, undervalued, most taken-for-granted resource in Kentucky is forages. Why? Probably because they come so easily for us. Hence, we fail to more fully utilize that which comes too easily.

*Better utilization* is the second most beneficial forage practice that works for me. Better utilization is achieved with frequent rotations to a fresh salad bar through the use of poly-wire and a pressurized watering system which provides cool, clear, clean water within 600 feet of the cattle. Such improved utilization of pasture allows for better nutrient recycling through improved distribution. For example, it has been estimated that every square foot of such a managed paddock will receive at least one manure pile within two years. This explains why pasturing removes so little soil nutrients since most of that which is removed is shortly returned. In my personal experience, after many years of annually soil testing, I find that I rarely need to add fertilizer in paddocks without shade. This certainly results in saving me one of the bigger expenses...and the easiest dollar I've ever earned was the dollar that I saved. The biggest risk to improved utilization is the temptation to take more than we should. The hardest practice for me to follow in the past has been the recommendation to "talk half – leave half."

The third practice that works for me is *maintaining 30-40% legume stand in endophyte friendly fescue pastures*. Of course this requires a reasonable level of fertility with proper pH levels. But the single most effective practice in maintaining an acceptable legume mixture comes from sowing clover seed somewhere on the farm almost every year. I also consult the latest variety test results from the University of KY before purchasing my seed. I plead guilty to being "tight," but I am not cheap. I buy the best when it comes to seed. To do otherwise, to me, is being "pennywise and pound foolish" – and a lost pound today is serious money with today's cattle prices.

The fourth forage practice which I've earned the right to advocate is – *stay focused on pasture production the hay production will take care of itself*. This notion is easily

understood for two obvious reasons. One, when you are focused on grazing every day possible, you are going to have fewer days when you feed hay, thus requiring less hay. Secondly, springtime growth in KY usually will force most grazers to make some hay to preserve the quality of the extra pasture available. For too long I was focused on hay production. Staying focused on pasture production and utilization has truly resulted in more fun and profit, and profit is fun.

My fifth and final practice has been adopting the attitude that "*we never get too old to learn.*" I decided years ago that I'd rather be green and growing than ripe and rotting. That's why whenever there is a grazing conference or forage program, look around...I'm probably there. In the end, it's not what we know that counts, it's what we do. Knowing is not enough. It's like a man who knows how to read but doesn't...he is no better off than the one who can't.

