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Time to Turn Out, Are You Ready?

Hay piles tend to get low this time of year, animals are reaching through fences to nibble green grass shoots on the other side and producers might be growing tired of the chore of feeding. All this signals that spring is here and “turn out time” isn’t far away, especially on our cool season pastures. Some recent rains make it seem like we might have grass, but are you, the livestock and most importantly - the pasture, ready? Let’s take a look today at planning checklist for this busy time of year.

The green grass and high market prices may make it seem like an attractive option to put as many animals as possible out on new tender growth. Is that the best choice long-term for the operation? Do you have a business plan? Grazing plan? Livestock health and management plan? It can be very tempting to get “grass fever” and divert from well thought out plans, especially with the outlook for good market prices on the backside of the grazing season. If you find yourself there, take a moment to reflect on the plans, remember you are operating a business, and ask yourself the following:

- What is the plan for weed/brush control, fertilizer, grazing management and proper pasture management to insure the grazing system stays ahead of grazing pressure for plant benefits?
- What is your planned stocking rate? Will forage production be expected to match that rate this year or is adjustment needing to be considered?
- Do you have a plan for drought, reduced forage production or water systems issues and have planned alternate locations for the livestock?
- Have risk management tools for forage and livestock production been put in place, such as PRF or LRP? If you haven’t looked at these tools, think about them prior to sign-up deadlines.
- Is there a component of the livestock operation that can be rotated to different forages, moved to dry lot or marketed early?
- Has an adequate rest period been planned for the plant recovery to build carbohydrate root reserves? Planning rest may be more important than planning grazing!
- What is the harvested forage and/or feed plan for next winter? Do you know how many days you need to be grazing and subsequently feeding supplemental feed with these inventories?
- Has the flock/herd been given pre-breeding vaccinations and been treated for parasites?
- Will the livestock be in adequate Body Condition for the onset of breeding season? If not, does supplemental feed exist to get them into proper condition or should breeding be delayed?
- Are replacement females at a proper age and target weight to breed up quickly?
- Have the breeding males undergone a Breeding Soundness Exam and ready physically?
- Is ample sire power on hand to cover all the females early in the breeding season? Do you have a plan if there aren’t enough breeding males or if injuries occur?
- Should artificial insemination be part of your operation, do you have semen and supplies needed to synchronize estrus and efficiently AI?

This isn’t a comprehensive list by any means, but are good points to think about if you haven’t yet. This is the time of year and a good market year, when it is easy to get excited and have much optimism about the livestock business. It is also time to be planning for the future and keeping the business poised for economic sustainability into that future.