



BALE GRAZING —

WINTER FEEDING WITHOUT THE OVERHEAD REDUCES MACHINERY COSTS, LABOR

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Bale grazing has been practiced in deep snow country for quite some time but is just catching on in Wyoming.

Bale grazing is simply setting out bales (or not picking them up) and letting the livestock graze the feed out of the bale. Having expensive machinery to put out feed frequently is not needed, and keeping equipment on hand that can handle large size hay bales if you only have a few head of cows probably doesn't make economic sense. Renting or borrowing equipment for a day to set out the winter feed supply makes more economic sense.

Bale grazing also can be used to improve low organic matter soils from the leftover hay or trampling coarse vegetation by placing bales where needed. Williamson Land and Cattle Company near Moorcroft has used bale grazing to add organic matter and other nutrients to low production sites dominated by crested wheatgrass.

Managing Bale Grazing

Limit livestock access to bale grazing areas. Preferably, no more than three days' worth of feed should be opened up to grazing at any one time. If given more access, livestock tend to cherry pick the feed and waste more by bedding and fouling the hay. In a perfect world, livestock would be given access to what they need that day, then the next day let them access more, and so on. However, the entire herd should be able to have access to feed or the more dominant animals will get more than their share. Allowing enough room for all animals to access the bales often requires more than one day's feed provided at a time.

Temporary electric fence run between bales is generally used. This fence can be moved easily to allow access to the next set of bales. Make the job easier by considering how to set out the bales to easily fence them. Picture the length of body of the livestock that will be grazing from them and give enough room for two more animals to move easily behind

the feeding animals without contacting the electric fence.

What about "Wasting Feed"?


The feed not consumed is extremely apparent because the bale is sitting in one spot but even when feeding with a bale processor, waste is often around 20-30 percent of the total hay provided. Bale grazing waste will likely be more but may not be much more than other hay feeding methods.

If using bale grazing to build soil, then the leftover feed is really not wasted at all but becoming soil organic matter.

Feed Quality

Depending on your objective for bale grazing, consider different feed qualities. If supplementing livestock with abundant, low-quality forage, then a high-quality feed will likely fit the bill. Livestock usually will clean up the area if high-quality feed is offered, leaving very little residual feed.

If soil building is the objective, then lower-quality feed will tend to leave more residual that will add organic matter to the soil.



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