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# Livestock

## Soil health is key to good pastures

By **DOUG WARNOCK**  
Greener Pastures

**Greener Pastures**  
Doug Warnock



Does healthy soil promote productive pasture, or does a productive pasture result in healthy soil? The answer is they go hand-in-hand. A well-managed pasture will promote healthy, productive soil.

Grazing managers, like other crop producers, should pay close attention to their soil and its health. After all, grazing managers are grass or forage farmers who use grazing animals to harvest their forage crop. The health and vigor of the forage crop is key to its productivity and longevity. It is important that grazing managers devote time to looking at the soil and understanding what is going on in the soil to support the plants' vigor and growth.

Soil is healthiest when the soil surface is covered with a combination of growing plants and plant residue. The plants and plant residue protect the soil from eroding and provide a healthy habitat for the many organisms that live in the soil.

Soil is the home for earthworms, bacteria, fungi and other small and microscopic forms of life. For these organisms to be functional and healthy, they need to have moisture and organic matter. Active, growing plants that are partially harvested and re-growing on a regular basis contribute necessary food and habitat for soil organisms.

The growing plants contribute decaying organic matter, moisture and cycle minerals that make for healthy soil. Healthy soil is the world's greatest carbon sink and reservoir of water. Regenerating and sustaining healthy soil is one of the most important ways to achieve a healthy ecosystem.

Grazing animals provide one of the most effective tools to regenerate and sustain healthy soil. Properly managed grazing animals harvest enough plant tissue to stimulate plant regrowth, deposit important minerals and organic matter and

break down soil surface crusts to improve water penetration.

Proper management will include a planned, adaptive management approach to grazing. It encompasses higher stock density, limited plant exposure time, adequate plant recovery time and adaptive decision-making. Higher stock density results in more uniform utilization of the forage, greater animal impact on the soil surface and uniform depositing of minerals and moisture from the animal's digestive system.

Limiting the time of plant exposure to grazing reduces the chance of overgrazing plants and insures that plants have adequate tissue to support regrowth. Animals, either staying too long or returning to a pasture too soon, reduce plant viability and make it harder for the plants to survive.

Pasture ecosystems are complex, biological entities that are subject to many factors. It is difficult for the manager to have planned for all the many things that might happen during the grazing season. Therefore, regular monitoring will reveal times when adjustments may need to be made in order to achieve the results intended.

A planned, adaptive management approach to grazing will result in healthy pasture ecosystems that support healthy soil and vigorous plants, which cycle carbon and retain moisture. Regenerated grasslands support healthy life of all forms and help to create a healthy planet.

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## Industry leaders talk about disaster response

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — Fallout from a foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in the U.S. would cost \$128 billion over 10 years, representatives of the Washington livestock industry say.

Intentional introduction of foot-and-mouth disease is the biggest concern for the livestock industry, and should be for every American, said Jay Gordon, policy director of the Washington State Dairy Federation.

"A natural disaster would be a lot easier to work through than a foreign animal disease," agreed Jack Field, executive director of the Washington Cattle Feeders Association. "The challenge we face on large feedyards and dairies just has to do with the sheer volume of traffic in and out."

Gordon and Field took part in an Oct. 26 food security forum in Walla Walla, Wash.

Field said traceability is critical. Many ranchers are voluntarily tagging their animals to access international markets, which place higher standards on U.S. products, he said.



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Jack Field, executive director of the Washington Cattle Feeders Association, and Jay Gordon, policy director of the Washington State Dairy Federation, speak during a panel discussion on food security Oct. 26 in Walla Walla, Wash.

"Rather than having a state or federal regulator say to a producer, 'You have to put this tag in,' when the marketplace says, 'If you don't put the tag in, you can't sell the animal here,' it's a pretty short discussion," Field said.

Gordon spoke of his experiences in various disasters, including floods, fires and the effects of trade wars.

The mad cow case in 2003, when a dairy cow in Washington state was found to have been exposed to bovine spongiform encephalopathy in

Canada, cost more than \$2.5 billion to the beef trade. It was a wake-up call, but it wasn't really a disaster, Gordon said.

Gordon praised the industry with keeping a consistent message and having a leader in then-state department of agriculture director Valoria Loveland to direct and keep information accurate during the BSE case.

As part of a response team for a bovine issues working group, in a crisis Gordon and Field go to the farm gate to speak to the media to keep

people from getting onto the land while the farmer helps state and federal officials.

A disaster requires immediate and local response, then state and hopefully federal assistance. Leaders must listen to many stakeholders and commit to learning, planning and adapting, Gordon said.

An audience member asked how educators can prepare students for the industry's future security needs.

Field said students need a good work ethic, sharp mind, to be receptive to new technology and willing to adapt.

In a crisis, Gordon said, too few people understand agriculture.

"How do you teach somebody to respond and sit at a kitchen table or community center and say, 'Sorry all your hay fields burned?' or 'Sorry all your markets are gone?'"

Gordon said. "Don't come sit at a kitchen table or Grange hall in the middle of a disaster and think you know everything, because there's going to be 50 different facets you didn't think of. The hallmark of really good leaders is they listen really, really well and then make good decisions based on good information."

## Cattle producers focus on labels, safety in lab-grown meat discussion

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**  
Capital Press

Producers of conventional beef shared their concerns with the USDA and the Food and Drug Administration during a two-day hearing on the potential hazards, oversight and labeling of cell-cultured meat and poultry products.

Fair and accurate labeling and marketing of those alternative products was a top concern.

Labels for "lab-grown fake meat" should be held to the same standards as other meat labels, Kevin Kester, president of National Cattlemen's Beef Association, said.

"Given that the goal of these products is to compete directly with real meat, only USDA oversight can adequately ensure this outcome," he said.

Some proponents of the lab-to-fork industry have begun to engage in misleading marketing efforts to promote lab-based products and disparage real meat, he said.

"These advocates are unapologetic about their desire to enhance consumer acceptance



Press Association File

A burger made from cultured beef. Beef producers argue that "lab-grown fake meat" should be held to the same standards as all other meat.

of lab-grown fake meat products. They are not concerned with the accuracy of terms such as "clean meat," which have no scientific basis," he said.

USDA requires that all product labels be based on sound science and can be trusted to enforce truthful and transparent labeling of all products under its jurisdiction, he said.

The agency requires all labels be pre-approved before hitting store shelves, giving USDA the opportunity to stop

false and deceptive labeling before products enter the marketplace, he said.

"In contrast, the Food and Drug Administration does not require pre-approval of product labels," he said.

Under FDA oversight, manufacturers are free to label their products as they see fit, and some worry about potential consequences later, he said.

"Unfortunately, the FDA has consistently shown it is either unwilling or unable to

enforce product labeling standards," he said.

FDA turned a blind eye to labeling abuses by fake milk manufacturers for nearly three decades, he said.

Beef producers have worked hard to build their brand and differentiate their products, and terms such as "beef" should only be applicable to products derived from livestock raised by farmers and ranchers, he said.

"Manufacturers of lab-grown products should be required to invest in their own market-development efforts and not ride the coattails of beef's success," he said.

Since 1986, ranchers have invested nearly \$1.1 billion to build the beef brand through the beef checkoff, Danni Beer, U.S. Cattlemen's Association past president, said.

"It is wrong for any part of our beef checkoff dollars to be used to promote cell-cultured proteins either domestically or internationally," she said.

In addition, the alternative protein industry should not be allowed to villainize the beef cattle industry, she said.

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