

Pasture management

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Oh no! The carefree days of summer are gone for this year. I love autumn as it stirs my nesting instincts. Preparing for the cold and wet winter months sends us forth thinking of weather tight roofs and a full larder for humans and animals alike. It may be too mind boggling to think of our pasture's needs at this time of the year. Did you know that this is the most important time to be addressing your pasture for future grazing? Area # 4's recent meeting was an eye opener for us on the activity that is going on in the ground right now. Even though your pasture is brown from the dry weeks and doesn't require mowing does not mean that it is inactive. The truth of the matter is that there is unseen activity going on below the surface of the soil. Your pasture forage is actively producing a new network of roots that will sustain it in the seasons to come. This is actually an important time to pull your livestock off so that the pasture can recover. It is also a time, if you have not done so already, to submit a soil sample. Providing nutrients and corrections to the Ph of your soil at this time of the year will give your forage areas a much needed boost. This is also a time to think in terms of crossfencing your pasture areas. Overgrazing only leads to poor pasture conditions as well as good breeding ground for parasites. If you are like my husband and I, you are probably too overwhelmed with full time jobs and herd health to even spend much time thinking about this topic. This is when I retreat to the 'five year plan'. Some would say this is just poorly disguised procrastination but time and cash flow must dictate what the priorities are on my farm. For us, providing good shelter and secure fencing is number one on the list at this point in time. To think of purchasing expensive amendments for the soil in addition to creating more interesting forage for our goats just isn't in the picture. But we have pulled the herd in to the barnyard. A first step toward better management. At least give the soil and plants a break at this important time of the year. As we replace weak portions of our fencing we will do it with the idea of pasture rotation in mind. I call it the 'baby steps' of land management. The big picture is overwhelming so we will do one small parcel of field at a time so that at the end of the five years, we will have a well managed system rather than a poorly tended fallow pasture area to offer our stock.

I can't speak for Extension Services in other areas of our membership but here in the Willamette Valley we are blessed with agents who are generous with their time and information. Melissa Fery from OSU Extension is a godsend to Area #4. She is a wealth of information to the small farmer. Please get to know your local agent. It makes the whole process of improving your farmstead much easier. They will help you with what amendments your soil needs, what the best forages are to introduce to your particular area and also what toxic plants may be lurking in the areas that your goats are browsing. Just like with veterinary services, the more that we get up close and personal with these resources, the more we will see our caprine friends getting the recognition that they deserve.