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# Hoos-Your Grazing Network

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## **Grazing Cornstalks**

**Steve Boyles, Ohio State  
Extension Beef Specialist**

Grazing cornstalks can give pastures a chance to store sugars for the winter and to continue growing.

A 1000-pound cow can graze on one acre of corn residue for about two months. But it is important to graze cornfields soon after harvest, because after 60 days the nutrient content of cornstalks starts to decline.

Cattle grazing corn residue will select and eat leftover corn first, then husks and leaves, and finally cobs and stalks. While grain is in the field, cattle will be eating a diet that exceeds the protein and energy needs of the cow in the middle of pregnancy. If corn is visible in the manure, supplementation with vitamins and minerals is probably all that is needed. However, when most of the grain is eaten, protein supplements should be added.

A cow in mid- to late gestation consuming husks and leaves will need about 5 pounds per day of average-quality alfalfa hay. Pregnant heifers in late gestation should not be allowed to graze cornstalk fields after all the grain has been eaten. When all the

grain is gone, the energy availability is greatly reduced, and the heifers may require more energy for gaining weight than what is in the leaves and stalks.

The most efficient way to graze corn residue is strip grazing – using electric fence to allow animals into a portion of a field. Controlling the area grazed with moveable electric fencing can increase residue consumption by up to 50 percent by preventing the animals from grazing selectively and trampling many of the leaves and husks.

Grazing days per acre can be increased if cornstalk fields are strip grazed in weekly to bi-monthly blocks. Strip grazing offers an additional advantage in that diet quality is elevated when animals are released into the new areas of a field on a timely basis.

Producers with a conservation plan should check with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to be sure that grazing cornstalks does not violate their plan.

Grazing cornstalks effectively can help reduce feed costs and allow recovery time for pastures. If you can use harvested cornfields, they are an excellent feed source.