

## **Poor Pasture Management-My Expensive Mistake**

Every day for four months during the winter of 2016 I had to feed an extra two hundred pounds of hay daily due to a series of poor pasture management decisions. Of course it also happened to be the year that it didn't stop raining. This meant I got completely doused in water whenever I had to feed my cows.

At the time of this story I lived in Tillamook on the Oregon Coast, a place that is known for dairy cattle grazing on abundant grassland. My parents were both raised on dairy farms and my dad was employed in the dairy industry. We had a small farm where we raised my show heifers and two Angus cows.

I have always heard my grandfather talk about how and when he was putting the cows out on pasture each spring. He always says that pasture management is critical for the field's health. I didn't understand this until the year that I was 11 and I had to make my own pasture management choices.

We had a four-acre pasture that was comprised of fescue, perennial ryegrass, orchardgrass, and a clover mix. Since this was the coast and we lived close to the ocean, the soil is a sandy loam and drained easily in normal winter conditions.

The winter of 2015 in addition to my beef cows I had asked to keep my show heifers at our property also rather than to send them to a nearby dairy. This was the first bad decision.

We didn't have enough barn space that year to keep all of the animals in the barn without crowding them. So, we let them roam the field while still having access to the barn. My second bad decision was to let them have the whole field instead of just a portion at a time.

My third mistake was underestimating the weather. This was the year that we saw record setting levels of rain. By the time spring came the whole field was just plain mud. The grass hadn't had a chance to grow back because the heifers were constantly on the field. There was no time for rejuvenation. The grass had had no time of dormancy.

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As the year went on, even with summer and part of fall for rejuvenation, the grass still didn't grow very well. The pasture eventually came back but it took all through until the next spring. This meant buying feed the whole summer, fall and winter.

Now looking back I realize exactly what my grandfather had meant when he said that pasture management was important. This was very costly for me, but I only have five cows. Imagine my grandfather making the same mistakes I did with 350 cows.