

Workshop Title: Intensive Pasture Management

Speaker(s) & their titles: Sébastien Angers, Les Viandes Rheintal

Executive Summary

Paying attention to your pastures and grazing times is most important for maximising yield. Pastures provide most energy at certain stages in growth. Pigs will ruin a pasture if not taken off or put on at the wrong stage of plant growth. The mix of species in a pasture can be adjusted according to every farm and climate. Pay attention to managing pastures for best longevity and results.

Detailed Notes:

Sébastien has an agronomy degree and runs Les Viandes Rheintal, a pastured pork and beef operation that grows their own feed, situated in Trois Rivières, Quebec.

Challenge of pork pasturing is that not many people do it and so you need to find your own answers through trial and error.

Always have good pasture growth. Putting pigs on overgrazed pasture results in them digging. The younger the pigs, the more they want to dig.

In the spring, it's important to get the pigs out there before overgrowth occurs. Wheat-pea-barley-oats mix is seeded as a nursery crop with undersowing of a hay mix (see notes from Animal Management with Sébastien Angers for more details).

Fencing

White ribbon electric fence doesn't work to keep in 200 pigs because it is hard to train 200 pigs to the fence. Instead, use electric net fencing that they won't bolt through when given a shock. It is sturdy (bring in over winter) though every 2-3 weeks the bottom of the fence has to be dug out.

Ponds are imperative for the pigs to provide them their sunscreen.

When the fields are wet, the cattle and pigs are locked in. Compaction kills the pasture so keeping aeration in the land is essential for healthy long lived pasture. More than an inch of rain means the animals will be locked in.

Pasture is reseeded every 3-4 years. Pasture's are often undervalued but you can get a high yield from them with minimal input. It pays well to keep well, though often they are most neglected. Stay on top of it e.g. Deterioration due to lack of lime might not show until 3 years later when it's too late.

Sébastien doesn't till when re-seeded. The field is grazed and overgrazed hard to reduce vegetation. Then he repeatedly cultivates, 3-4 times and then seeds at double the density per ha (35kg/ha).

**2011 NS ACORN Conference
Holiday Inn Halifax Harbourview**

To move the animals, the fences are moved gradually along the field, reducing the pasture size gradually.

Questions to ask when planning pastures and managing land:

How many animals? What condition are they in? For how long will they be on that pasture and in which season? What resources are at hand? What is the objective?

Most important: know the number of hours of feeding and rest, density of animals and impact of animals on soil.

At what height of pasture do we put the animals on and take off?

Animals taken off pasture at 10cm

Pasture species traits:

Orchardgrass, fescue and white clover give good resistance to compaction.

Tall fescue gives good energy, cold hardy

Kentucky bluegrass is resistant to trampling.

Italian ryegrass regrows quickly, cold hardy.

Orchardgrass grows quick in the spring and keeps weeds down, but when badly managed becomes too dominant. It needs to be grazed low or it will become fibrous and a barrier to further grazing.

The ideal mix is different for every farm. Sébastien goes by percentage: 55% ryegrass, 20% fescue, 15% white clover, 10% orchardgrass

Seeding density is at 25-30 lb/acre, more dense than normal but allows pasture to last longer.

In the fall, to re-seed, a field is overgrazed hard and then seeded in the spring with the grain (wheat, oat, peas, clover) with hay underseeded. Then animals are allowed to pasture the grain field at milk stage to leave the underseeded hay mix to succeed.

Calculating hay and animal needs is done via spreadsheet. See presentation and welcome to email for more details.

Comes out to approximately one cow per acre.

Manure is all solid, all spread onto grain operation, 100 cubic meters on corn field in autumn.