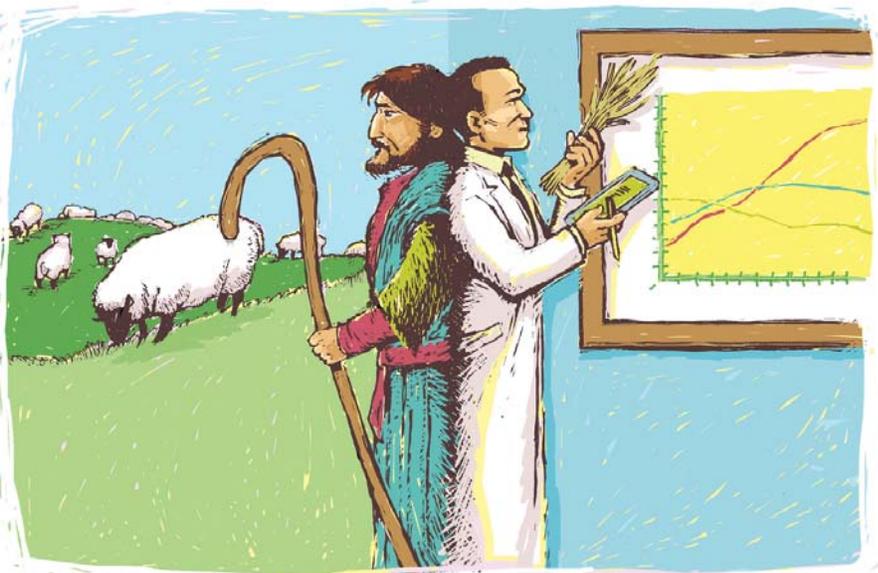


LOOK WELL TO THE HERDS

Domestication of grazing animals is thought to have begun about 10,000 years ago—and cultivation of forages some 3,300 years ago. The grazing animal-human relationship has enabled societies to expand and prosper in ways that would not have been possible otherwise, but with it has come the responsibility of animal husbandry. Shepherds and herdsmen throughout history have been portrayed as strong individuals determined to protect and feed their flocks. There are many references, for example, in the Bible concerning grazing animals, shepherds, and herds...



“...Thy servant kept his father’s sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth...” (1 Sam. 17: 34-35).

“He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth” (Ps. 104:14)

“Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.” (Prov. 27:23)

Perhaps the most important responsibility of grazing animal husbandry is the provision of feed, especially forages. Forage has been defined as *“edible parts of plants, other than separated grain, that can provide feed for grazing animals or that can be harvested for feeding.”* Given this definition, forages include a wide array of plant species and parts. Forages provide more than just feed though. These crops can provide vital soil conservation benefits, help keep rivers and streams free of contaminants, and serve as wildlife habitat. There are many management components in the maintenance of productive and sustainable forage systems, and important among these is nutrient management.

As the world’s population continues to grow over the next few decades, so will the demand for animal products such as meat, milk, and fiber, and along with this will naturally come a demand for more high-quality forage and the knowledge and experience to produce it. In a time when most agronomists’ attention is given to major grain crops, perhaps it’s time to revisit and recount the value of forages.

BETTER CROPS

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