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### **STARGRASS PASTURES FOR GROWING CATTLE**

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Young growing cattle can make daily gains of approximately 1.5 pounds per head on well-managed stargrass pastures in autumn, spring, and early summer. During wet periods of mid-summer and following frost, stargrass pastures are typically not satisfactory for young growing cattle.

Stocking to obtain maximum gains per acre will produce individual animal gains well below the maximum. A visual overview of a stargrass pasture can provide an indication of the relative rate of gain which will be obtained. Pastures with a green leafy appearance provide the greatest opportunity for cattle to select large amounts of high quality forage and make top gains. When stems and runners become obvious from visual scanning of a pasture, slight reductions in individual animal gains can be anticipated. As the pasture appearance changes from green to light brown and stems gradually dominate the top layer of grass, cattle spend increasingly more time picking the desirable forage with intake, diet quality, and individual gains decreasing.

Even with considerable stem development and reduced individual gains, gains per acre may be maximized. For specific purposes such as heifer development, it may be desirable to manage for high individual gains at the expense of high gains per acre. Under such conditions, some management flexibility is essential. Reducing the number of animals to reduce grazing pressure may not be desirable. Rotational grazing with four or more pastures provides the opportunity for cattle to be moved to new pastures as needed. Also, the amount of nitrogen fertilizer applied can be adjusted as needed to produce appropriate amounts of forage in pastures to be grazed later.

A stargrass pasture managed for high rates of individual animal gain will develop a stemmy stubble layer. This stubble is not wasted forage. It contributes to plant vigor, forage yields and stand survival.

While stargrass pastures can be stocked to provide high rates of gain per acre, such stocking rates usually produce low levels of individual animal gain. Intensive management is necessary to successfully produce high individual animal gains on stargrass pastures. Specific needs, such as early breeding of heifers or rebreeding of first calf heifers, may make the extra effort worthwhile.