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# Grazing to Avoid Trouble

Food Animal Concerns Trust, January 26, 2021

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PRESENTED BY LINDA COFFEY, NCAT SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE SPECIALIST



**ATTRA**  
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

**FACT**

# Introductions

- ▶ Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT) is a national nonprofit organization that advocates for the safe and humane production of meat, milk, and eggs.
- ▶ Larissa McKenna
  - Humane Farming Program Director
  - Email: [lmckenna@foodanimalconcerns.org](mailto:lmckenna@foodanimalconcerns.org)
  - Website: [foodanimalconcernstrust.org/farmer](http://foodanimalconcernstrust.org/farmer)
- ▶ FACT's services for livestock and poultry farmers include:
  - Fund-a-Farmer Grants
  - Conference scholarships
  - Free webinars
  - Humane Farming Mentorship Program

FACT



# Introductions

▶ 1-800-346-9140

— 8:00 am to 5:00 pm CST,  
Monday - Friday

— ATTRA is a project of the National Center for Appropriate Technology,  
with offices in Montana, California, Texas, Mississippi, New Hampshire,  
and Arkansas

▶ Linda Coffey,

— NCAT Sheep and Goat Specialist

— Email: [lindac@ncat.org](mailto:lindac@ncat.org)

— Website: [attra.ncat.org](http://attra.ncat.org)





Photo: Linda Coffey, NCAT



# Maple Gorge Farm, Prairie Grove



Photos: Linda Coffey, NCAT

# Define “Trouble”

What kinds of trouble have you had on your farms?



Photos: Linda Coffey, NCAT



# Here are some possibilities

- ▶ Toxicity (as in Johnson grass after frost, prussic acid, nitrates, fescue toxicity)
- ▶ Poisoning (as in poisonous plants)
- ▶ Metabolic problems (acidosis, for instance)
- ▶ Bloat
- ▶ Internal parasites
- ▶ Predators
- ▶ Overgrazing
- ▶ Let's vote! Which of these is *most important*?



# That depends!

- ▶ Forages grown
- ▶ Weather
- ▶ Animals
- ▶ Stage of production
- ▶ History of the land
- ▶ MANAGEMENT





# An ounce of prevention

- ▶ Here are some key principles:
- ▶ Diversity of forage species helps:
  - Intake
  - Soil health
  - Animal health
  - Prevent trouble
- AND
- Desperation is BAD.



# Another key principle

- ▶ A well-nourished \_\_\_\_\_ is a healthier \_\_\_\_\_ because good nutrition makes for a stronger immune system and a more resilient organism.
- ▶ So, feed the soil, the plant, the whole farm, the animal, the person.



# Bloat

- ▶ Can happen in high-legume pastures or on lush spring pasture
- ▶ Prevent by:
  - Feed some hay first, or other high-fiber forage
  - Don't put them in hungry on wet forage
  - Limit graze; move off after an hour or so until they adapt



Photo:



Photo:

# Strip grazing fescue



Photo:

# Fescue toxicity

- ▶ On our farm, we have to be aware
- ▶ Some years are “hot” and some are not
- ▶ Toxins decrease after frost
- ▶ Dilution is the key to preventing trouble
- ▶ If you have trouble:
  - Get off the fescue; at least a week before lambing
  - Supplement with some energy and some hay
  - Talk to your vet about Domperidone or Equidome to get milk let-down in ewes



# Other Toxicity issues

- ▶ Nitrates
- ▶ Prussic acid
- ▶ Grass tetany
- ▶ Don't over-fertilize
- ▶ Stay off sorghums and brassicas after frost for at least a week; be careful after a drought
- ▶ Feed high-magnesium mineral to prevent grass tetany

Photo:



# Poisonous plants

- ▶ Mostly, if they are raised with these, they won't eat
- ▶ For example, perilla mint, bitter sneezeweed, silverleaf nightshade....
- ▶ Beware of wilted wild cherry leaves, peach leaves, landscaping plants.
- ▶ What issues have you had with poisoning?





# Some points to remember

- ▶ Dilution is good. Diversity of forage improves intake and reduces risk
- ▶ Desperation is bad
  - Drought
  - Overstocking
  - Not moving soon enough
  - Drought can set you up for toxicity in some plants
  - Dosage makes the difference



# Predation

- ▶ <https://foodanimalconcernstrust.org/lgd>
- ▶ Livestock guardians are wonderful or can be a disaster! Check out FACT webinars from Jan Dohner for an excellent series; very well done and informative.

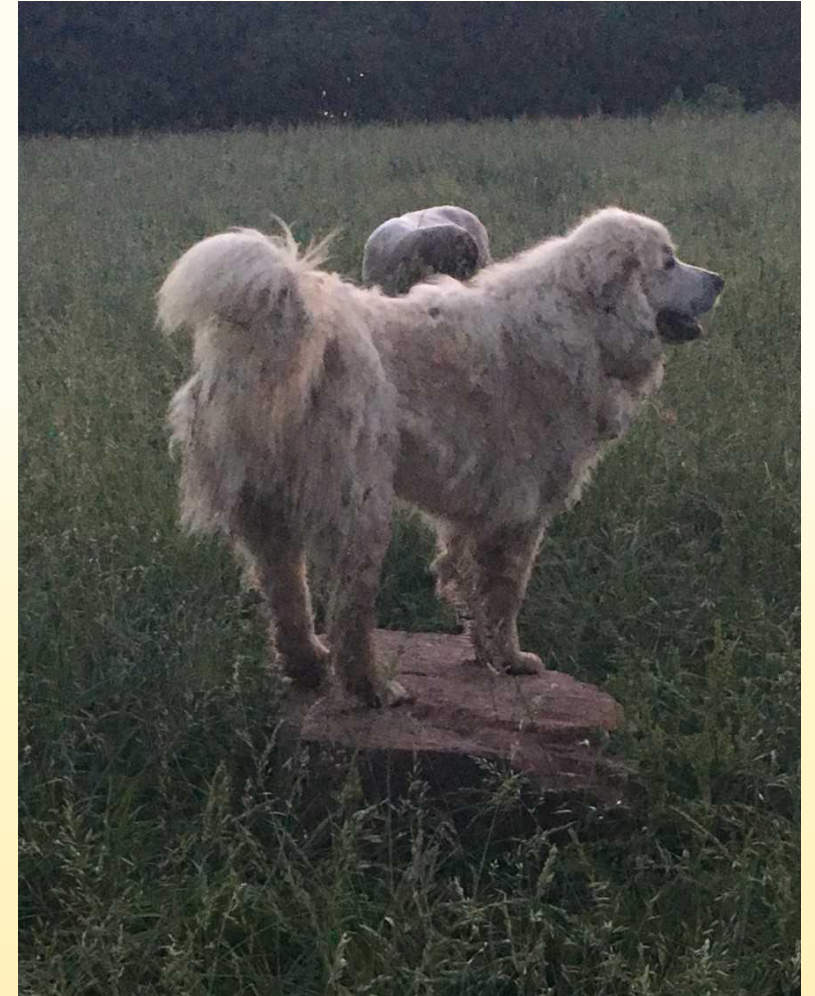


Photo:

# Livestock Guardian Dogs

- ▶ ATTRA tip sheet:

<https://attra.ncat.org/livestock-guardian-animals-protecting-the-flock/>

- ▶ Texas: <https://sanangelo.tamu.edu/research/lgd/>

- ▶ ATTRA Podcast with Jan Dohner:

<https://attra.ncat.org/episode-169-livestock-guardian-dogs/>

Photo:





Photo:



Photo:

# Internal parasites

- ▶ First know this: it takes every strategy you've got to stay ahead of this problem!
- ▶ ATTRA publications: see [www.attra.ncat.org](http://www.attra.ncat.org)
- ▶ Topic area: Livestock and Pasture / Sheep and Goats / Health
- ▶ FACT webinar series: *Managing Internal Parasites*
- ▶ Wormx.info





Photos:





Photos:





Photo:

# Summary

- ▶ Graze an area 3 days or less
- ▶ Rest an area 40 days or more
- ▶ Leave behind at least 4-6"
- ▶ Offer diverse forages
- ▶ Browse and forbs are useful
- ▶ Multispecies grazing helps



# Overgrazing



Photos:

# Impacts

- ▶ Soil
- ▶ Forages
- ▶ Animals
- ▶ Soil organic matter
- ▶ Water
- ▶ Internal parasites
- ▶ Weeds
- ▶ Productivity of the farm
- ▶ Profitability



Serious!! So how do you prevent?



# Preventing overgrazing

- ▶ Stock your farm appropriately
- ▶ Leave residual (I like to see 4")
- ▶ Good fencing
- ▶ Pay attention!
- ▶ Remember:  
You can create your own drought by your management



# Stored feed to allow pasture recovery



Photo:

# Water in every pasture



Photo:



# Use emergency feed



Photo:

# Concentrate animals



Photo:

# Let pastures rest and recover



Photo:

# Stay away from trouble!



Photo:

# Useful resources

- ▶ *ATTRA Managed Grazing Tutorial*
- ▶ *ATTRA Blog 6: Adaptive Grazing: You Can Do It*
- ▶ NRCS
- ▶ Grazing Schools
- ▶ Grazing Groups
- ▶ *The Art and Science of Grazing* by Sarah Flack
- ▶ *On Pasture* online magazine, Kathy Voth
- ▶ ATTRA specialists and publications and podcasts:  
[attra.ncat.org](http://attra.ncat.org) or 800-346-9140





Photo:

# Thank you!

Please type your questions into the chat box on the left



[attra.ncat.org](http://attra.ncat.org)

[Linda Coffey: lindac@ncat.org](mailto:lindac@ncat.org)

[Farmer helpline: 1-800-346-9140](tel:1-800-346-9140)

# Trouble



Photo:



# Questions?

*Please type into the chat bar on the left!*



# Connect with



## Upcoming webinars

- 🐔 **February 11:** Solar Grazing for Sheep
- 🐔 **February 25:** Pasture-Based Livestock: Advancing Ecological, Economic, and Emotional Resilience

## Grants, Scholarships, Mentorship & More!

- 🐔 **Handouts on nutritional benefits of pasture-raised animals**
- 🐔 **Scholarships – ongoing**
- 🐔 Sign up for emails @ [foodanimalconcernstrust.org/farmer/](https://foodanimalconcernstrust.org/farmer/)

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