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Timing Spring Turn-out

Posted on [May 25, 2019](#) by [Betty Summerhayes, OMAFRA, Technology Transfer Specialist](#)

Timing Spring Turn-out

Spring is in the air, and cattle and farmers alike are eager to start the grazing season. Timing that delightful move is critical, as spring grazing management sets up both yield potential of the pasture and the amount of gain achievable for calves and yearlings.

How early is too early?

Livestock should go out on pasture when grasses have fully developed three to four new leaves. Turning out earlier than this is very stressful on the plants. Perennial forages rely on carbohydrates stored in their root systems to fuel regrowth when they break dormancy (Figure 1). The plants do not refill those carbohydrate stores until they have enough leaf area to produce more sugar than they need to grow. By waiting until grasses have three to four fully developed new leaves, those plants are given a chance to put energy back into the roots. The plants will draw on those reserves again to recover from grazing. If cattle go out to pasture too early, the plants have not been able to refill their root reserves and there is no energy to draw on when grazing takes their leaves away. This early spring stress will reduce pasture yields for the rest of the grazing season. If livestock are turned out too early year after year, weeds that begin their growth later in spring than grasses may be able to out-compete the forage plants.

Read more in the OMAFRA article [Timing Spring Turn-Out.](#)

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