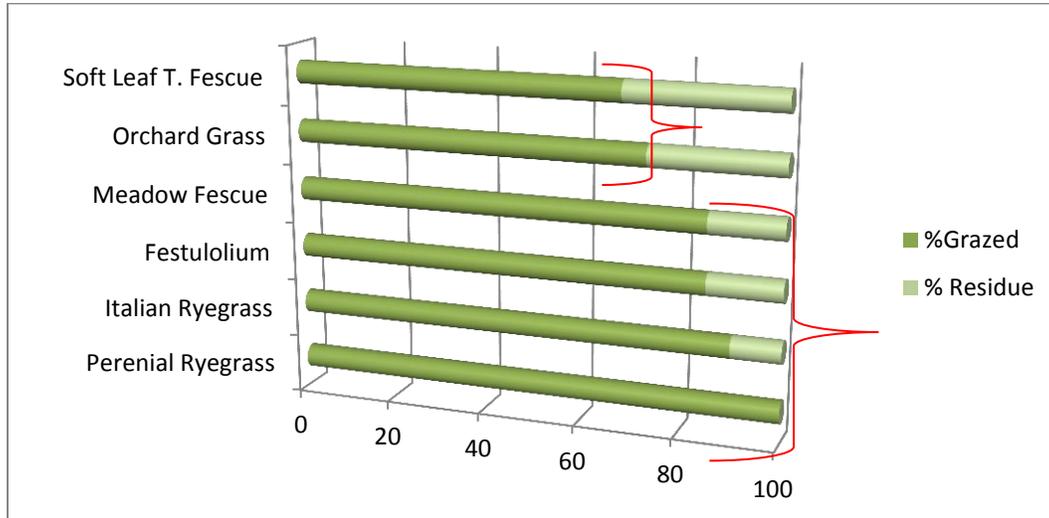




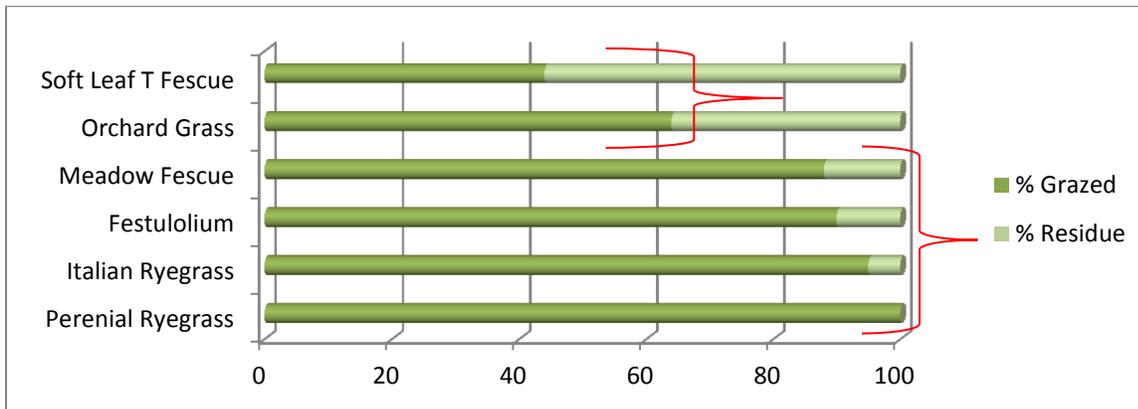
Grazing research has indicated that one of the most important factors in pasture productivity and longevity is grass residue. Because grass stores most of its carbohydrates above the ground, and because it relies on photosynthesis to build those reserves, we should place a high value on residue.

What part does pasture palatability play in grass residue management? In monocultures, decreased palatability may result in reduced dry matter intakes, but residue can be managed very effectively. However, in poly-cultures residue management is much more complex. Animal preferences for different species can frustrate even the most experienced graziers.

In a trial we did on our farm a few years ago, we tried to measure the palatability of different grass species and give each a palatability index. Prior to the first grazing of spring, six different grass species were identified and measured. Then, after the grazing event, residues were measure again and averaged and a palatability index was given to each. In this trial, 2” of residue was considered 100% utilization and anything less was the percentage of what was grazed off the individual species. The grasses averaged 12” high at first grazing.



We then tracked these species for a second grazing event 30 days later. What we discovered is that the increased residue in some species broadened the palatability spread of the following grazing. This is probably because of over-grazing the more palatable species, thus delaying their development for the next grazing event.



Over time, we could imagine that the more palatable species will be “grazed out” while the less preferred will thrive. While I believe that poly-cultures are important, my experience has been that pasture intakes go down, in many cases, because the cows exhaust resources searching for, and overgrazing, the most palatable species.

So, if pasture residue is important, [which it is,] shouldn't we use grass species with comparable palatability to prevent the over-grazing of the most favorable grasses? I feel this has been a greatly overlooked aspect of pasture blends that has set many pastures, cows and farmers up for failure. We should avoid blends that have grasses of varying palatability together, such as Soft Leaf Tall Fescue and Ryegrass. If you want to plant Tall Fescue for agronomic reasons, (say droughty, sandy soil), plant it in a monoculture, or possibly with a legume.

Meadow Fescue and Festulolium work very well together in the Midwest and Northeast and their palatability's are very compatible. This is why we used them as the main components in this new, exciting blend. This is a pasture mix that you can recommend with confidence and will give them good, consistent quality with easy to manage palatability indexes. The Festulolium component gives quick establishment that diminishes the need for a nurse crop, while the Meadow Fescue and white clover give longevity to the mix.

You will also have the backing of GrassWorks Inc., the largest grazing education association in the Midwest, and NRCS who have endorsed this mix as something they want their farmers to be planting.