

Rational management of pasture: well-being and benefits

Problem: pasture, in addition to being a food source for animals, is also a fundamental resource for preserving the biodiversity of the environment. Its correct use, therefore, allows not only to satisfy the nutritional needs of the animals (reducing feeding costs as a function of less use of concentrates) but also to preserve the soil and the turf.

Incorrect use of pasture can lead to both overgrazing, with consequent desertification of the soil, and undergrazing with consequent colonization of the turf by non-palatable species and shrubs.

Solutions: the correct management of the pasture requires knowledge of its composition, the production trend and the variation of its quality. At the same time it is necessary to evaluate the feeding behavior of animals. The factors on which the farmer can therefore act for proper grazing management are: the livestock load and the grazing system. The grazing systems can be of various types: continuous or rotational. The choice of one or the other system is dictated by individual situations and business needs. Continuous grazing involves the uninterrupted use of the turf and can be of fixed or variable load. Rotational grazing involves the subdivision of the entire area into plots with rotational use of the same by the animals. While for continuous grazing the biomass remains fairly constant over time, in the other system, since there is more time available for the grass to grow back after the grazing period, the quantity and quality of the pasture change markedly over time. Two other types of rotational grazing are "hourly" grazing and complementary grazing. This last typology foresees the passage of the animals first on pastures of legumes followed by pastures of grasses during the same day.

The adequacy of the load of animals is assessed on the basis of their number, the available area and the grazing period by evaluating the needs of the animals and the production of the pasture. The vegetative stage of the plants and the pedoclimatic conditions influence the quantity and quality of the pasture. The distribution of the animals must be homogeneous so as to be able to use the pasture uniformly.

Practical recommendations:

- Evaluate the height of grazing grass: a height of less than 3 cm leads to over-use, while a height greater than 13 cm leads to under-use. A height between 5 and 10 cm is suitable for the correct maintenance of the pasture;
- use the "hourly" grazing system in autumn and winter, when grazing availability is limited and to avoid compaction and excessive trampling of the soil, while still guaranteeing the animal's functional gymnastics;
- use the complementary grazing system in spring to maximize the productions per hectare of crops;
- use additions with concentrates commensurate with the quantity and quality of the pasture to make the quantitative and qualitative production of milk homogeneous;
- the improvement and conservation of the pasture can be achieved through agronomic practices such as: water regulation, fertilization, grooming, thickening and overseeding of improving essences.