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Grazing to control pasture composition

R. A. Bettenay
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ON THE DAIRY FARM

TO CONTROL PASTURE COMPOSITION

By R. BETTENAY, B.Sc. (Agric.), Adviser, Dairying Division

Apart from grazing management, there are a number of means by which the farmer can influence pasture composition.

These include fertilising; mowing (for silage or for hay) or topping at other times of the year to control a specific weed; spraying for insect or weed control; harrowing to spread droppings; cultivation in one form or another, perhaps followed by cropping and reseeding. With the exception of grazing, all of these processes involve recurring costs, so it is important to exert the utmost possible control through the grazing animal.

A dairy farm without sidelines should contain from 15 to 20 paddocks, the size of the paddocks being determined by the acreage of the property and the number of cows being carried, so that there are initial costs associated with control by grazing if additional fencing is required.

With regard to time of grazing, we recommend that dairy pastures should be grazed on a rotational basis. Many cases have been observed in recent years where the farmer has used too long a rotation and only obtained three or four grazings over the growing period. This is in keeping with the recommendation to graze when the pasture reaches a height of six inches and to graze down to one-and-a-half inches, but some discretion must be used here, as it seems likely that this practice has led to a marked increase in some weeds. I recommend grazing at more frequent intervals of three to five weeks, depending on growth, and grazing at a high level of stocking to obtain a more uniform result.

The milking herd can then be followed by dry stock and yearlings, and if necessary topping can be carried out before the dry stock are introduced to the paddock.

Overall stocking rate—that is number of stock carried on the farm—also has a marked effect on botanical composition. The aim of every farmer should be to get all paddocks into a cuttable condition, to allow him to build up adequate reserves of hay and silage to carry the herd through periods of shortage, and then to progres-