



Grazing During the Summer Slump

By: Sjoerd Duiker, Professor; Justing Brackenrich, Leanna Duppstadt, Extension Agronomists and Guojie Wang, Forage Specialist, PennState Extension

As we approach the peak of summer, with hot, dry weather, we need to adjust our grazing strategies to maintain pasture longevity.

The summer slump is when perennial cool-season grasses slow in growth or essentially go dormant. Lots of factors contribute to the summer slump of perennial cool-season grasses. High soil and air temperature in summer is the main factor. The optimum temperature for perennial cool-season grasses is between 60°F to 80°F; anything above this, the growth of perennial cool-season grasses dramatically declines. The second factor is the regrowth of perennial cool-season grasses after spring peak growth, mainly vegetative growth made up of leaves. The vegetative canopy in summer is shorter than the reproductive canopy in spring; therefore, not as efficient for light interception and photosynthesis. The third factor is the limited soil moisture content. Low soil moisture content limits soil nutrient movement, and plant stomata may close, limiting the absorption of carbon dioxide and loss of plant turgor. The summer slump of perennial cool-season grasses is significant because perennial cool-season grasses are the predominant species in Pennsylvania pastures. Seasonal distribution of forage production is critical in grazing systems. Animals are alive and need a consistent supply of forage. It is essential to avoid grazing too low to meet animals' needs during the summer months and sacrifice pasture long-term productivity and longevity. Maintaining at least three to four inches of standing pasture is the general rule of thumb for grazing practices. Still, it is especially important during the summer slump for various reasons.

First, what you see above ground is reflected belowground. This is where the graze half–leave half rule comes into play – research has shown that if grasses are grazed very short repeatedly, the root system dies back significantly, and the stand declines. This is critical during summer as grasses try to scavenge for limited water sources. This could cause thin stands and allow for weed encroachment. Most problematic pasture weeds have taproots, which makes them excellent water scavengers because that taproot grows deeper than the fibrous root system of grasses. Research shows, that grazing too short, as could occur in a continuous grazing system,



Dairy heifer pasture (Credit: L. Duppstadt, Penn State Extension)

during the summer slump, results in increased weed populations during that time. Grazing too aggressively could also negatively impact the grass's ability to regrow as temperatures cool in the fall.

Second, just like tall, thick forage stands can help to protect crowns and tillers from freezing, they also shade them, providing protection from high temperatures, especially soil temperature for root growth and functioning. Root growth is more sensitive to soil temperature fluctuations and extremes than shoot growth to air and canopy temperature. If grazed too low, base tillers in the crown area could be exposed to temperatures as high as 95°F compared to temperatures in the mid-70s °F under a well-developed canopy. The reproductive tillers in the current growing season will be dead after they produce seeds or short after grazing and cutting for hay. It is the newly developed tillers from the plant crown area in the current growing season that make the plant perennial. Therefore, those high temperatures in the crown area due to limited shading from the short stubble could cause tillers to die and result in thin stands.

Third, many grasses store carbohydrates as energy sources and proteins as nitrogen sources in the lower portion of their stem, i.e., perennial cool-season grasses need a saving account as they prepare for harsh times. They need that 3-4 inches of stem left behind so that they can use the stored energy and nitrogen to grow new leaves. Once enough leaf area acts as solar panels, grasses can photosynthesize more efficiently and

The **South Central New York Dairy and Field Crops Program** is a Cornell Cooperative Extension partnership between Cornell University and the CCE Associations in six counties.



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South Central NY Dairy and Field Crops Program

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begin replenishing energy and nitrogen before the next grazing cycle. That energy is also used to maintain a hardy root system that is able to scavenge for water and nutrients. If the grasses are grazed too short, they use up all their stored nutrients to grow new leaves and don't have enough energy left over to maintain a dense root system so the roots will die off.

Eventually, they will regrow new roots once enough leaves are present to photosynthesize and begin storing excess nutrients again.

Implementing a **rotational grazing** system is one of the best ways to maintain sufficient grass height. Separate a large pasture into smaller sections with permanent or temporary fencing and rotate animals out when grasses reach that 3 to 4-inch height. They can then be rotated back into an already grazed paddock when forage height reaches at least 6-8 inches.

As temperatures continue to climb and rainfall becomes less prevalent, there may come a time when grazing animals should be **taken off** cool season pasture to help maintain its quality and resiliency. To supply summer forage, it is ideal to have a portion of the farm in warm-season annuals and/or perennials. These forages are adapted to high temperatures and dry soils.

Examples are millets, sudangrass and sorghum-sudan hybrids, teff, sunn hemp, cowpea, forage soybean, switchgrass, big bluestem, and indiangrass. If you only have cool season pastures, bringing animals into a dry lot, feeding reserved forages for a few weeks, and allowing the grasses to regrow will help increase stand longevity and reduce the need to reseed a stand that has become thin from overgrazing. If a dry lot isn't an option, consider using a section of pasture that is in poor condition and needs some Tender Love and Care. The extra nutrients provided from animal urine and dung and imported hay material can supply nutrients and the pasture can be reseeded in the fall, if necessary, once the animals are removed. Be sure to use an area with adequate fencing, whether permanent or temporary, as animals will be prone to push the fence and try to get to "greener" pasture.

Check out [Extending the Grazing Season with Plant Diversity](#), for alternative forage options during the summer slump or [Harvesting and Feeding Warm-Season Annuals for Forage](#), to find more details on utilizing warm-season annuals.

Save the Dates

Upcoming Programs

Beef x Dairy Finishing - An On-Farm Tour

Thursday, July 16, 2026

6-8pm

Minturn Farm (5627 Sevier Road Auburn, NY 13021)



This on-farm event will share findings from a NE SARE funded project assessing health, efficiency and profitability of growing and finishing Beef x Dairy cattle on a New York Feedlot/Farm. The farm owner will share numbers related to average daily gains, health, rumination data and more on BxD cattle versus beef type breeds. The farm will also showcase their feedlot, handling facilities and weighing system during the tour. This project is a collaboration between Centerstate Cattle Co, CCE SCNY Dairy & Field Crops Team, and CCE NWNYS Dairy, Livestock & Field Crops team.

Free, registration appreciated! Light refreshments provided.

https://apps.ideal-logic.com/cornellcoop?key=NYCG-GFKZS_K9KH-5PTF_8e74d306871e

Silvopasture Pasture Walk

Friday, July 17, 2026

10:30am-12:30pm

Twin Oaks Dairy, 3185 NY-13, Truxton, NY

Twin Oaks will showcase their 2021 silvopasture planting which includes some black locusts that are 20+ feet tall. Plans for further plantings will be discussed, as well as other aspects of their rotational grazing system. For those who need assistance with the walk to the Silvopasture, UTV's will be available to shuttle people as needed.



This on-farm event is a collaboration between Twin Oaks Dairy, American Farmland Trust, CCE SCNY Dairy & Field Crops Team, CCE Tompkins County, National Grazing Lands Coalition, Cortland County SWCD, NOFA-NY, and Dairy Grazing Alliance.

Free. Click Link to register [Twin Oaks Dairy \(Silvo\)Pasture Walk – Fill out form](#)

Virtual Fence and Bale Grazing Pasture Walk

Thursday August 6, 2026

1pm-3 pm

Finch Family Farm, 490 McGraw Marathon Rd, Marathon, NY

Free

This summer time pasture walk will focus on three areas: Gallagher eShepherd collars for a grazing dairy, summer time grazing planning, and incorporating bale grazing into a rotation. The Grass Whisperer, Troy Bishopp, will guide conversation on our walk.



For more information contact Betsy Hicks, bjh246@cornell.edu 607.391.2673

to register click [HERE](#).

Tompkins County Beef Pasture Walk

Ray Hubbell Farm, 59 Harvey Hill Rd, Enfield

August 22nd, TENTATIVE 2-4pm

In collaboration with Tompkins County SWCD

Main points:

- Cattle handling system, chute funded by John May Farm Safety Fund
- Rotational grazing paddocks, including establishing a rotation and improving pasture quality and quantity
- SWCD work including livestock watering system and fencing



Questions: Contact Betsy Hicks bjh246@cornell.edu or 607.391.2673 or Paul Gier, SWCD PGier@tompkins-co.org
To Register Click [HERE](#).

The Ultimate Grazing School with Troy Bishopp

September 8-9, 2026

Lindley, NY

Limited registration! \$50 per person, includes 2-day course with lunch both days

This hands-on grazing school equips you with practical tools—from planning and measuring forage to benchmarking profitable strategies and navigating weather challenges—to boost resilience, production, and profitability. Good grazing is the foundation of a profitable farm or ranch, as it directly impacts soil health, forage quality, and livestock performance. Effective grazing management ensures optimal utilization of resources, reduces costs, and maximizes returns by improving pasture productivity year after year. For beginners and seasoned graziers alike, this course will provide hands-on learning and the sharing of peer-to-peer knowledge to build a solid network.



<https://www.grazinglands.org/events/ultimate-grazing-school-troy-bishopp> for more information and to register.

Bale Grazing Pasture Walk

Friday, September 25, 11-2pm

Hillside Farms, 4358 Crains Mills Road, Truxton, NY

Free, light lunch included

Jacob and Alexis will show how they've incorporated bale grazing in their farm to reclaim and improve grazing land for their beef cattle herd. As part of a three-year project, the farm highlighted their practices at a winter time pasture walk in January – come out this fall to see how it looks during the grazing season! The walk will include Brett Chedzoy, Betsy Hicks and John Burns with Cornell Cooperative Extension to guide conversation about bale grazing.

This walk is part of a National USDA-NRCS CIG Grant by the University of Kentucky Research Foundation entitled: Bale Grazing: A Practical, Low-Cost, and Environmentally-Sound Management Strategy to Winter Beef Cattle. The project partner states are Kentucky, New York, North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia. You can learn more by visiting <https://news.ca.uky.edu/article/usda-innovation-grant-bale-grazing-study-yielding-positive-results-kentucky>

Click [HERE](#) to register.

For more information contact Betsy Hicks, bjh246@cornell.edu 607.391.2673

Cropping Notes - June 2026

By: Janice Degni, Regional Extension Field Crop Specialist

How are GDDs racking up around the region?

Based on the 86/50 GDD calculation and a planting date of May 12, 2026, local summaries up to June 23 follow. Even though we have had a generally cool to cold May and the first couple of weeks of June have only had highs in the 70s we seem to be close to the 15 year average for accumulated growing degree days.

Growing degrees days can be correlated to crop development. The following chart shows the stages and corresponding heat units throughout the crop's development.

Location	GDDs to Date	15 yr. Average GDD
Aurora	590	623
Binghamton	586	589
Cortland	550	544
Horseheads	594	603
Ithaca	561	580
Owego	556	553
Reference: based on data supplied by the Cornell Smart Farming Tools: https://climatesmartfarming.org/		

Crop Progress and Early Season Pests

As we all know we had a late start to planting season which is somewhat extended into June. I have seen corn from a couple of leaves to approaching canopy closure. Corn generally looks good while soybean development is lagging a bit behind. Things might equalize once they start nodulating.

I've seen the typical array of early season pests from bird pulling out plants to gobbler seeds to deer grazing. As part of the applied research plots evaluating neonic seed treatments and underground insect damage I have been digging seeds. We have seen occasional seed corn maggot and wireworm damage as well as light cutworm and stem borer damage. I have not seen armyworm damage but have heard reports of their presence in other regions. If growing conditions are supportive, most corn will grow fast enough to minimize damage from these pests.

Reports on Hay Crop Yields

Early commentary on first cut is that yields were a bit lighter than normal. After alfalfa broke dormancy we had a series of nights with low temperatures that burned new growth over a two to three week period. Recovery from that takes energy and that would be a factor that would affect yields. Early spring growth from late April into May was slow, averaging around two inches per week. By May 19 we recorded a jump of up to 5" of growth in a week and by May 26 we were approaching predicted harvest timing. It seems that 2nd cutting yields were more in line with expectations.

Wheat came through the winter in good shape and has looked good all season. There is a current Pest Alert! for Stripe Rust. More information can be read here: <https://blogs.cornell.edu/whatscroppingup/2026/06/11/pest-alert-stripe-rust-of-wheat-reported-in-ontario-county-new-york/>.

Corn Growing Degree Days: A Method of Maturity Rating for Hybrids

Table 1. A Timeline for Corn Growth and Development



Growth Stage*		Approximate GDDs	Cumulative GDDs**	Description
-	Planting	0	0	Seed is planted.
VE	Emergence	100	100	Coleoptile emerges through the soil surface; seminal roots are established.
V3	Three-leaf collar	246	346	The growing point is below the soil surface; nodal roots are forming.
V6	Six-leaf collar	246	592	The growing point is at or above the soil surface; primary ear shoot initiated; nodal roots dominant now; tassel initiated; the number of kernel rows around the ear are determined V6-V8.
V9	Nine-leaf collar	246	838	Rapid growth is underway; brace roots may be present at the soil surface.
V12	Twelve-leaf collar	182	1020	Lower three to four leaves may not be present due to stalk expansion and leaf decomposition.
V15	Fifteen-leaf collar	150	1170	Kernel number per row determined.
V19	Nineteen-leaf collar	50	1370	Tassels can be visible, increasing in size, but not fully extended yet.
VT	Tasseling	50	1420	The last tassel branch is visible; pollen may be shed on the main branch of the tassel before all branches are fully extended.
R1	Silking	-	1420	One or more silks extending outside husk leaves; silks may be visible before the tassel is completely extended. A single plant can release 1/2 million or more pollen grains per day; silks are receptive to pollen for about 10 days.
R2	Blister	266	1686	Occurs about 10-14 days after R1; stress conditions, including drought, can cause kernels to abort at R2-R3.
R3	Milk	144	1830	Occurs about 18-22 days after R1, "roasting ear" stage; kernel color changes from white/clear to orange/yellow.
R4	Dough	151	1981	Occurs about 24-28 days after R1; less risk of kernel abortion from stress.
R5	Dent	343	2324	Occurs about 35-42 days after R1; stress can reduce kernel weight but not kernel # per ear.
	Dent - 1/2 milk line	-	-	Occurs about 10 days after R5; 90% of total kernel dry matter accumulated.
R6	"Black Layer"	326	2650	Occurs about 55-65 days after R1; physiological maturity—kernels have achieved their maximum dry weight and are safe from frost; kernel moisture averages 30% but can range from 25-40% grain moisture.

*Based on the leaf collar method, following Abendroth et al. (2011). *Corn Growth and Development*. PMR 1009 Iowa State Univ. Extension, Ames, IA. store.extension.iastate.edu/product/Corn-Growth-and-Development

**Approximate growing degree days (GDDs) between growth stages and cumulative GDDs adapted from Abendroth et al. (2011) and Nielsen, RL. (2021). *Grain Fill Stages in Corn*. Agronomy Dept., Purdue Univ. agry.purdue.edu/ext/corn/news/timeless/GrainFill.html

Welcome our intern Pilar...



My name is Pilar Gamage, and I am a rising sophomore at Cornell University, majoring in Animal Science. I am from Saratoga, NY, where I was actively involved in 4-H showing dairy cattle, FFA, and my county's dairy promotion team growing up. On campus, I am a member of the Cornell Dairy Science Club, the Large Animal Medicine Club, and a member of the Cornell Ski Team.

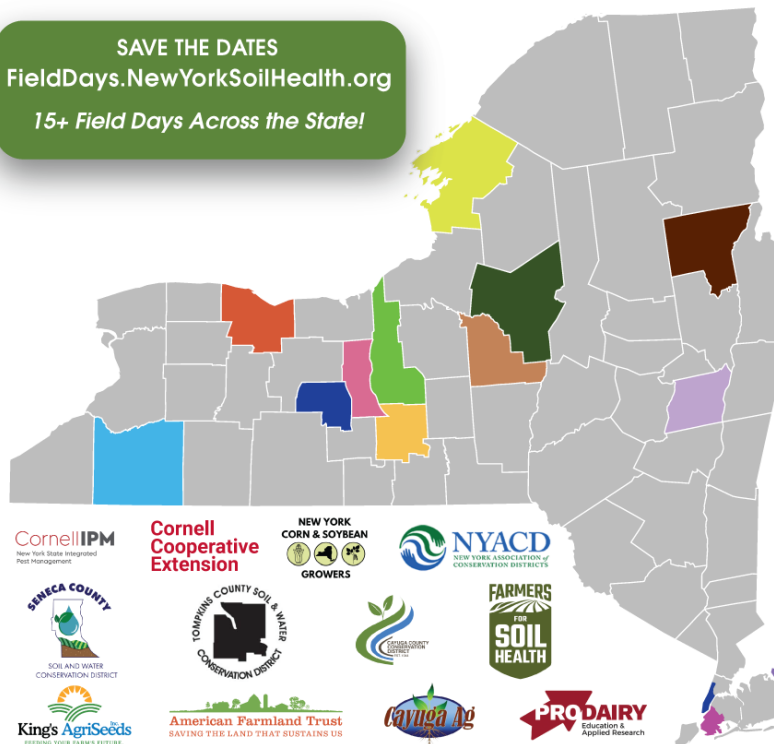
This summer, I have the opportunity to work closely with Cornell PRO-DAIRY and the Cornell Cooperative Extension South Central New York Dairy and Field Crops Team through my internship. My internship focuses on dairy systems, forage and waste management, to gain multidisciplinary experience relating to the circular nutrient system on farms, as well as learning how research, extension, and on-farm management practices work together to support New York agriculture.

Throughout the summer, I will be assisting with on-farm research, collecting and analyzing data, developing extension materials, doing outreach to the local community, and gaining laboratory experience with the Dairy Environmental Systems team. I am excited to learn more about the dairy industry and explore different aspects of the industry and how they work together. A part of my internship is also sharing weekly blog posts highlighting my experiences, projects, and what I'm learning, which is a great opportunity for me to share all of the great experiences I will gain this summer.



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June 25 | 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM | Adams, NY
Sheland Farms (Jefferson Co.)
Topic: Soil Health & Nutrient Mgmt in Dairy Systems



June 30 | 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM | Farmersville Station, NY
Nichols Farm (Cattaraugus Co.)
Topic: Soil Health



July 15 | 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM | New Hartford, NY
Owens Farm (Oneida Co.)
Topic: Soil Health & Grazing



July 17 | 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM | Riverhead, NY
Long Island Hort. & Research Ext. Center (Suffolk Co.)
Topic: Soil Health in Vegetable & Nursery Production



July 23 | 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM | Ithaca, NY
Groundswell Farm (Tompkins Co.)
Topic: Soil Health & Cover Crops



July 24 | 8:30 AM - 4:00 PM | Brooklyn, NY
Cornell IPM Conf. | Brooklyn Botanic Gardens (Kings Co.)
Topic: Urban Tree Health



August 4 | 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM | Glenmont, NY
Bethlehem Environmental Commons (Albany Co.)
Topic: Soil Health and Cover Crops



August 13 | 9:00 AM - 3:30 PM | Seneca Falls, NY
Rodman Lott & Son Farms (Seneca Co.)
Topic: Soil Health & Cover Crops in Field Crops



August 19 | Time TBD | Penn Yan, NY
Penn Yan, NY | Martens Farm (Yates Co.)
Topic: Biochar / Agrivoltaics / Soil Health



August 27 | 9:30 AM - 3:30 PM | Cazenovia, NY
Gianforte Farm (Madison Co.)
Topic: Soil Health in Organic Field Crops



September 1 | 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM | Rochester, NY
Foodlink Farm (Monroe Co.)
Topic: Urban Soil Health & Heavy Metals



September 17 | TBD
Musgrave Cover Crop Trial | Cayuga Co.
Topic: Cover Crops and Soil Health



September 30 | 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM | Queensbury, NY
SUNY Adirondack (Warren Co.)
Topic: Cover Crops and Soil Health



October 20 | 4:00 - 6:00 PM
Long Island Hort. & Research Ext. Center (Suffolk Co.)
Topic: Urban Soil Health and Heavy Metals

Spring 2026 Forage Quality and Growing Conditions

By: Pilar Gamage, Intern from Cornell University

Forage samples were collected from fields during the spring of 2026 and showed noticeable differences in forage quality. The sample analysis was sponsored by Dairy One and included measurements of the adjusted Crude Protein (Adj. CP), Acid Detergent Fiber (ADF), Amylase Neutral Detergent Fiber Organic Matter (aNDFom), and sugar.

The three samples were cuttings taken from hay fields this spring by members of the South Central NY Dairy & Field Crops Team with Cornell Cooperative Extension. The first sample, collected on May 20, was from a mixed grass field. Two additional samples were collected on May 26 from separate grass and mixed mostly grass fields.

To compare forage quality, nutrient values were evaluated on a dry matter (DM) basis. This allows for a more accurate comparison among samples by removing differences caused by the moisture content. Looking at only the as-fed values, one might assume the grass sample had the highest protein, but once all moisture was removed, the mixed mainly grass sample was clearly the highest protein forage, which is why it's important to analyze forages on a DM basis.

Results:

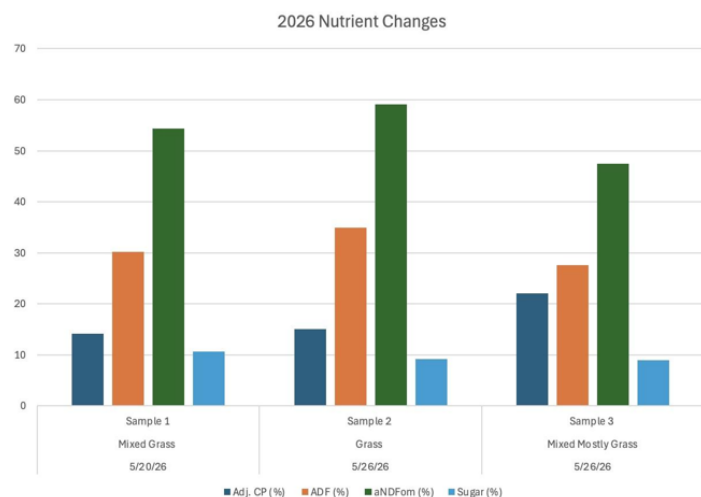


Figure 1. Comparison of adjusted crude protein, ADF, aNDFom, and sugar concentrations in the three spring forage samples collected during May 2026.

Sample 3 had the highest protein concentration, reaching 22% on a dry matter basis compared to 15% in sample 2 and 14.1% in sample 1. Sample 3 also had the lowest fiber concentrations (27.6% ADF and 47.5% aNDFom). Sample 2 had the highest fiber concentrations, measuring 34.9% ADF and 59.1% aNDFom. Higher fiber levels generally indicate more mature forage. Sample 1 had the highest sugar concentration, at 10.7%, which was slightly higher than the other two samples.

From these results, we can conclude that sample 3 had the highest forage quality of the three samples, combining the highest protein concentration (22% DM) with the lowest fiber concentrations (27.6% ADF and 47.5% aNDFom). Sample 2 appeared to be the more mature sample, as it had the highest fiber values, indicating it contained more structural fiber. The mixed grass field fell between the two other samples for fiber levels, but had a slightly lower CP and the highest sugar concentration.

Looking at fiber digestibility at the 240-hour mark, there were differences among the three forage samples. Sample 3 showed moderate fiber digestibility, with lower uNDFom and higher NDFD values than Sample 2, but a lower NDFD value than the mixed grass sample. Sample 2 showed a similar trend but had slightly lower NDFD, and higher uNDFom, indicating the sample had lower digestibility compared to the other two samples. Sample 1 appeared to be the sample with the best digestibility, with its 240-hour NDFD reaching 86.9% and its uNDFom reaching 7.1.

Summary of Growing Degree Days Throughout the Region:

Growing Degree Days (GDD) were evaluated using Climate Smart Farming's GDD Calculator with a base temperature of 32°F and a start date of March 1. Four locations were chosen for comparison: Cornell Dairy Research and Education Center (CDREC), Musgrave Research Farm, and two dairy farms in different regions of Cortland County.

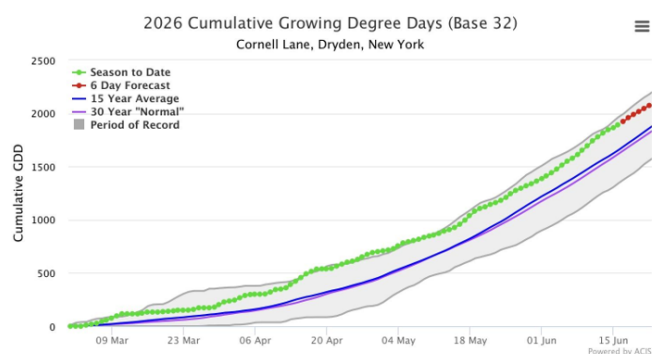


Figure 2. Cumulative Growing Degree Days (GDD) tracking at CDREC compared to the 15-year historical average (blue line) and the 30-year average (purple line). The green line indicates accelerated local heat accumulation for the current season, with the 1,500 GDD developmental target achieved on 6/05

Using locations from CDREC, Musgrave Farm, and the two farms in Cortland County, we analyzed GDD accumulation during May and June. We found that heat accumulation was significantly higher than both the 15-year and 30-year averages. These warmer conditions likely accelerated forage growth and development throughout the region, which may help explain some of the differences in forage maturity observed in the sampled fields.



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Upcoming Events Calendar

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July 17, 2026 10:30am-12:30pm	Silvopasture Pasture Walk Twin Oaks Dairy, 3185 NY-13, Truxton, NY To register: Twin Oaks Dairy (Silvo)Pasture Walk – Fill out form
August 6, 2026 1pm—3pm	Virtual Fence and Bale Grazing Walk Finch Family Farm, 490 McGraw-Marathon Rd, Marathon, NY Free. Registration: https://www.grazinglands.org/events/ultimate-grazing-schoo-troy-bishopp

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