

Grass Utilization

Profitable Pastures

Mount Forest, ON

March 10, 2020

Yield

- Cumulative = total production over time
- Available at an end point in crop production cycles

Yield

Row Crops



Yield

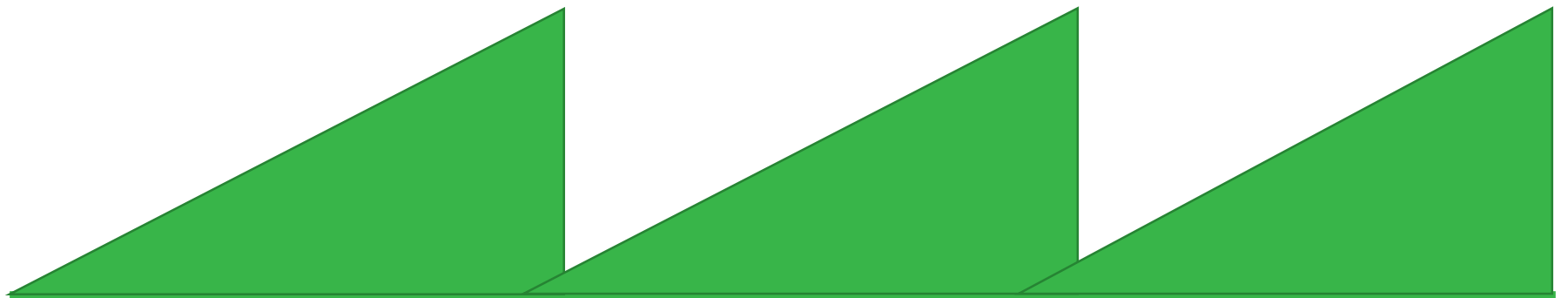
Forage Crops

Annual Yield

Yield 1

Yield 2

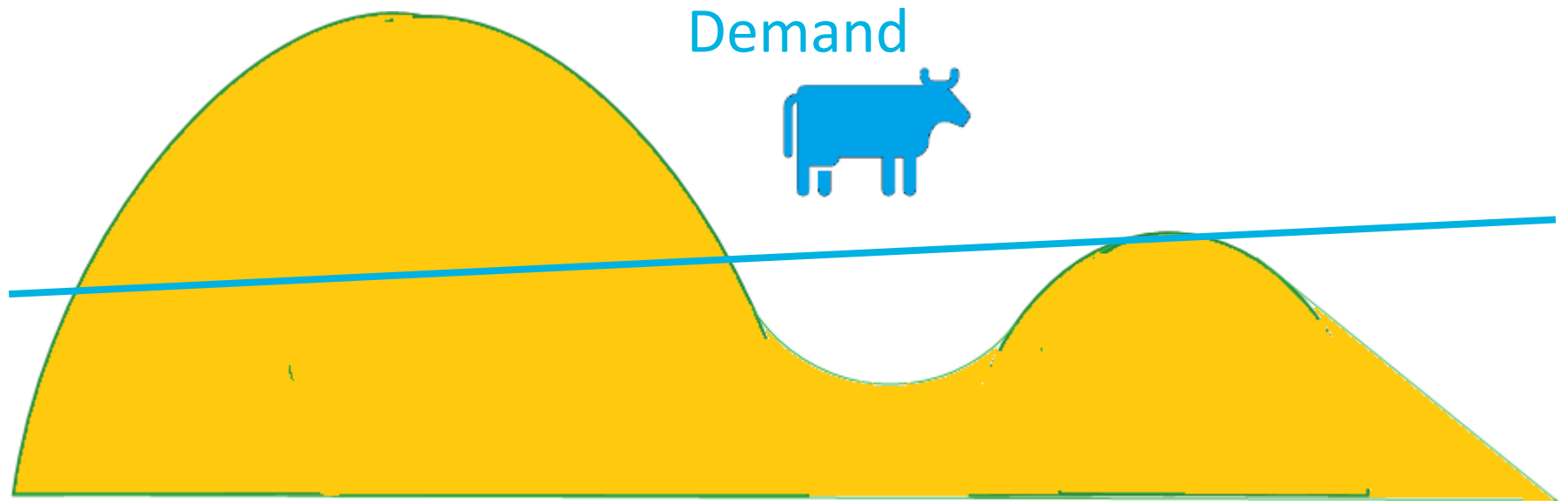
Yield 3



Yield

Pasture

Growth Rate



Demand



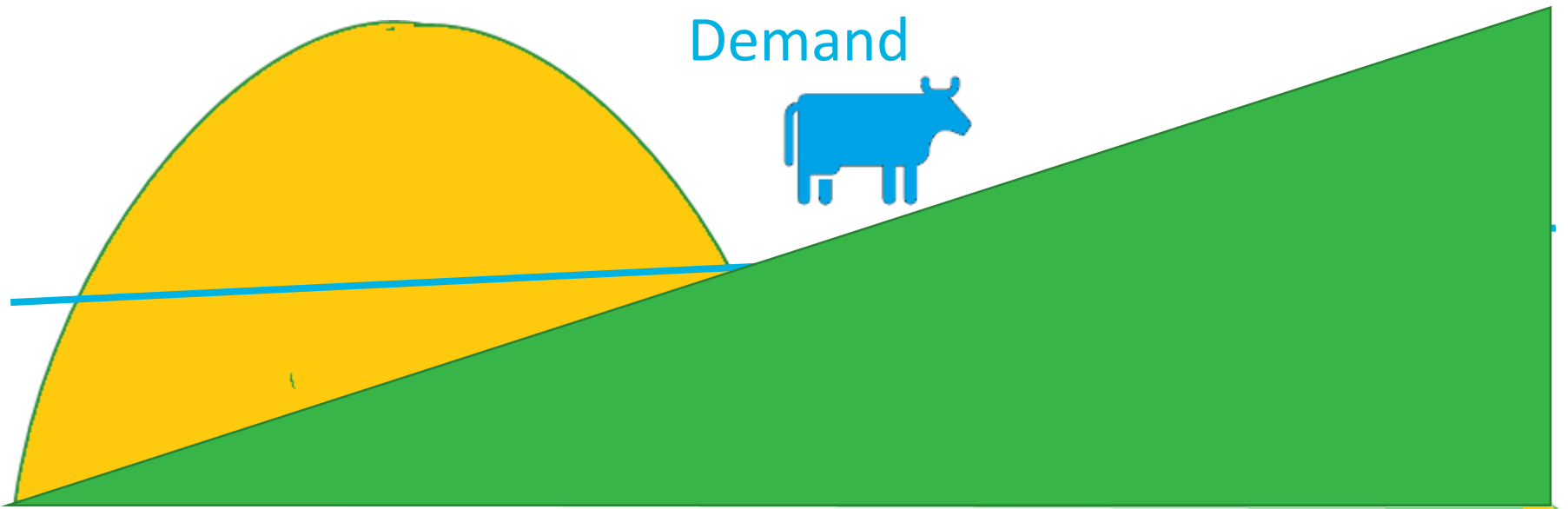
Yield

Pasture

Growth Rate

Demand

Yield



Yield cannot tell you how
much grazeable grass is
available at a point in time
because it is total production.

Cover

- The amount of grazeable grass available at a point in time
- A snapshot of your feed inventory
- Constantly changing as grass grows and livestock graze

Cover

Why should you know yours?

- Track how quickly grass is growing
- Enables real-time planning
- Promotes efficient use of forage
- Allows for production benchmarking

Rising Plate Meter

A grazing manager's secret weapon

- Combines grass height and stand density into one measurement
- Easy to use
- Needs to be calibrated for Ontario's mixed-species pastures – stay tuned!



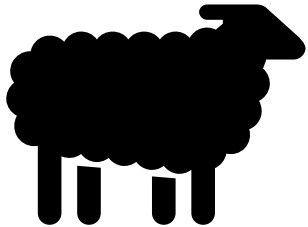
Grass Utilization

How much grass is actually getting eaten?

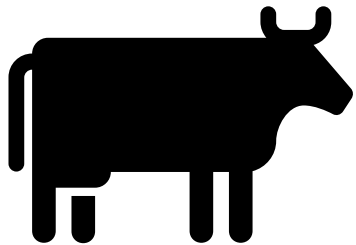
- % of cover
- Indication of grass quality (digestibility)
- Increasing grass utilization increases carrying capacity

Grass Utilization Targets

Ireland has targets for different livestock



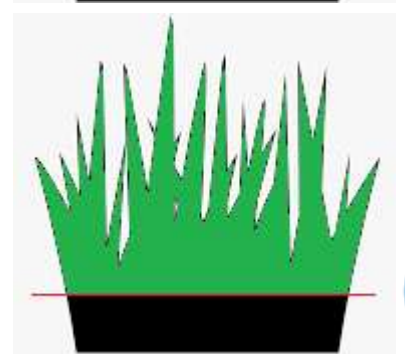
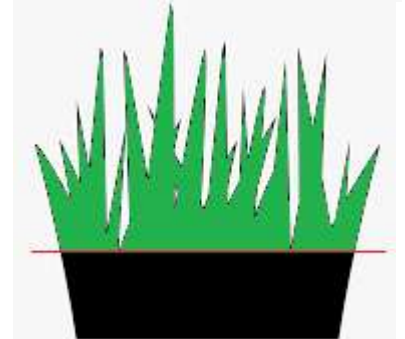
>60%



>60% for cow/calf pairs
>70% for stockers



>70% for replacement heifers
>80% for cows



What does this look like?

Cover is moderate.

Is utilization going to be high or low?



What does this look like?



What does this look like?



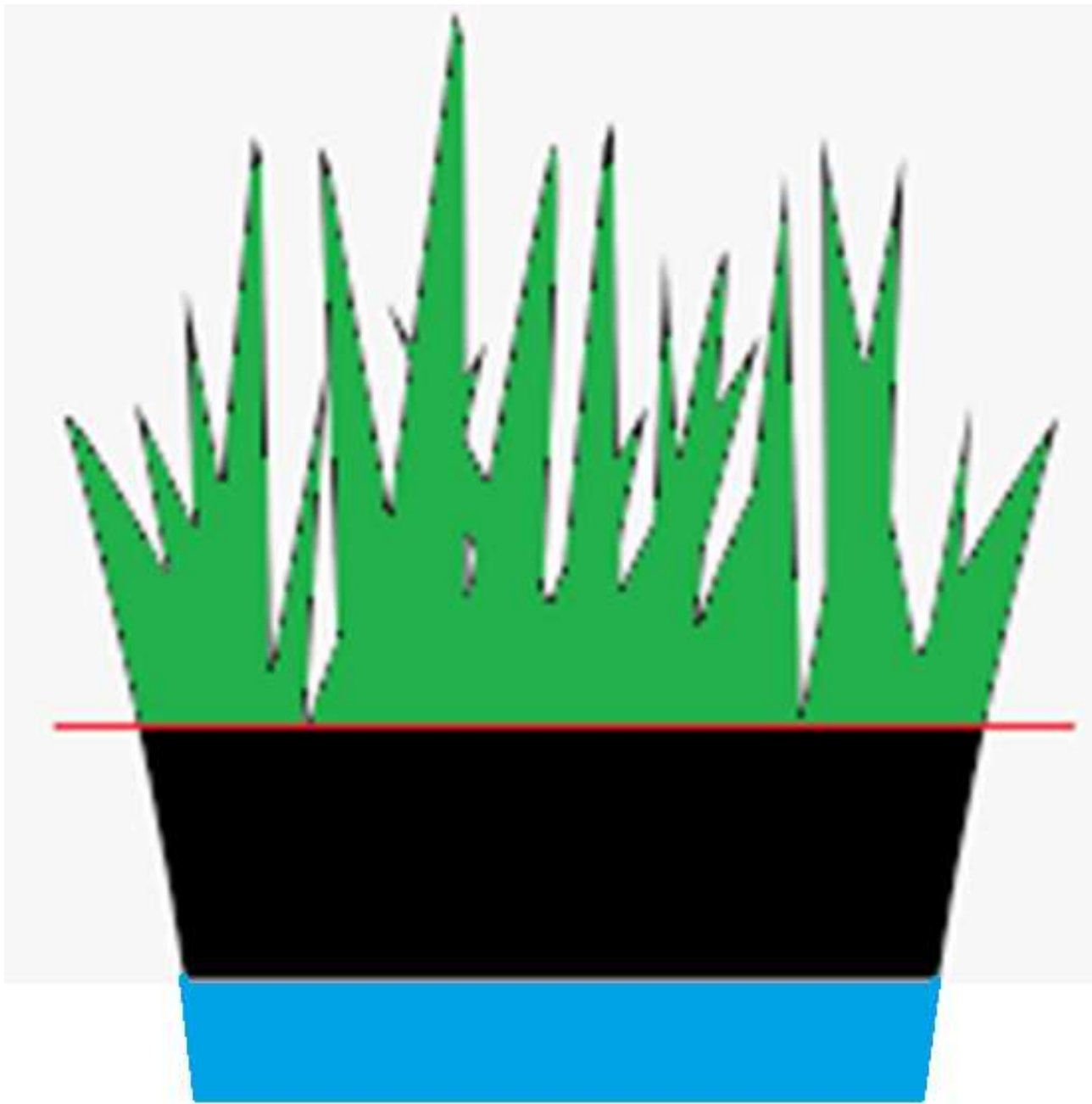
Grass Utilization

- Continuous grazing ~30% average utilization
- Optimizing utilization \neq maximizing utilization
 - Decreasing ROI as utilization increases
 - **Where is the economic sweet spot?**

Target Grazing Residual

- The amount of grass you plan to leave behind
- Enables faster grass recovery
- Grass cover “floats” on top of the residual
- Target should change throughout the year
- **Never less than 5 cm (2”)**





% utilization

cover

residual

Managing to target

Maintaining residuals and % utilization

- Higher covers = lower digestibility
- Choose strategies and techniques that work for you, don't get hung up on the system
- Mowing is a tool to maintain quality and manage residuals – use it!

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