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Forage News [2014-08]

University of Kentucky Department of Plant and Soil Sciences

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FORAGE NEWS

For more forage information, visit our UK Forage Extension Website at: <http://www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage/>

August 2014

Garry D. Lacefield and S. Ray Smith, Extension Forage Specialists • Christi Forsythe, Secretary

FORAGE TOUR PHOTOS

Our thanks to Dr. Randy Dinkins, USDA-ARS for taking photos of our Spring Faculty/Staff/Student Annual Tour. This year it was in West Kentucky with stops in Warren, Caldwell, Lyon and Grayson Counties. Photos are available on our website at <http://www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage/> (the link is at the top of the middle column).

KENTUCKY FORAGE & GRASSLAND COUNCIL FIELD DAY

The 2014 Summer KFGC Field Day was held July 17 in Hardinsburg, KY. The field day was hosted by the Breckinridge County Cooperative Extension Service. The field day was hosted by Joe and Glenda Burke and J.L. and Betty Burke. In addition to field stops featuring speakers discussing "Stockpiling for fall and winter pasture", "Establishing hay & pasture fields, Getting the most from your grazing program, Making baleage, Composting and Vaccination program, participants were treated to exhibits and displays and four walking tours dealing with Fencing and Watering, Ration Balancing and Minerals, Weed Control and Hay Testing. Our thanks to Carol Hinton and the entire field day committee for a most educational and informative farm event. Our thanks also to the Breckinridge County Cattlemen's Association for serving an excellent meal.

CHOOSE VARIETIES WISELY

Planning a new seeding? If so, attention to details will increase your chances of success. One of the many decisions to make is "which variety" to use. Selecting and establishing the right varieties can often make the difference between success and failure, low yield and high yield, persistent and non-persistent. To assist you in this important decision, the University of Kentucky Forage Variety Program has compared many varieties of several important forage species over the years in various locations across Kentucky. For a summary of all U.K. Forage Variety results, see your County Extension Agent or go to our Forage Website at <http://www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage/ForageVarietyTrials2.htm>

A FARMER'S CREED

Last month our AFGC Summer Meeting/Tour was in Pennsylvania. The tour concluded with a lunch and tour of the New Holland factory in New Holland, Pennsylvania. After seeing the manufacturing process of small and round balers from start to finish, we were invited to visit the museum and see the "silver" knotter among other historic items. On the way out, I was impressed with some of their literature and picked up a copy of "The Farmer's Creed". I was impressed with it and wanted to pass it on to you:

A Farmer's Creed

I believe a man's greatest possession is his dignity and that no calling bestows this more abundantly than farming.
I believe hard work and honest sweat are the building blocks of a person's character.
I believe that farming, despite its hardships and disappointments, is the most honest and honorable way a man can spend his days on this earth.
I believe farming nurtures the close family ties that make life rich in ways money can't buy.
I believe my children are learning values that will last a lifetime and can be learned in no other way.
I believe farming provides education for life and that no other occupation teaches so much about birth, growth and maturity in such a variety of ways.
I believe many of the best things in life are indeed free: the splendor of a sunrise, the rapture of wide open spaces, the exhilarating sight of your land greening each spring.
I believe that true happiness comes from watching your crops ripen in the field, your children grown tall in the sun, your whole family feel the pride that springs from their shared experience.
I believe that by my toil I am giving more to the world than I am taking from it, an honor that does not come to all men.
I believe my life will be measured ultimately by what I have done for my fellowman, and by this standard I fear no judgment.
I believe when a man grows old and sums up his days, he should be able to stand tall and feel pride in the life he's lived.
I believe in farming because it makes all this possible.
(SOURCE: *New Holland, originally published in October 1975*)

UNDERSTANDING THE 'INTENSIVE' IN INTENSIVE GRAZING

Management-intensive grazing and other intensive grazing systems have been promoted for quite a few years, but what does the word "intensive" mean when it is used with grazing?

What do you think of when you hear the phrase "intensive grazing"? Many small pastures with lots of fencing? Moving animals to new pastures almost daily or even several times each day? Lots of animals completely grazing small areas before moving to fresh pasture?

Most folks don't fully understand what the word "intensive" refers to when used with grazing. It's not intensive fencing. It's not intensive labor, nor intensive animal movement. And it's especially not intensive defoliation. Intensive is all about management.

Management can't happen unless there is a goal or objective – or more likely, several objectives. Many advisors classify goals in three main categories. They include financial/economic goals, lifestyle/quality-of-life goals and environmental/landscape goals.

A time frame also should be included within all goals. After all, actions that might maximize production or profit today or this year could result in pasture degradation and/or financial losses in the future.

Begin by deciding your goals and what you want to accomplish with your grazing. Profit, workload, sustainability, family participation and other factors all might influence the decisions, actions and methods you use to accomplish these goals.

Management is how you control the resources you have available. When you have only one pasture, you have little control of where and when animals graze.

This one pasture could be intensively managed by controlling the number of animals placed in the pasture, when they are allowed in and when they are removed. This placement of animals could be repeated many times throughout the year if that would allow you to meet your goals.

Even greater control, though, might be accomplished by dividing your grazing land into many smaller pieces or paddocks. But most importantly, how do you manage the grazing of each individual small paddock, as well as combine all the small pastures into one management unit?

One of the bigger mistakes many people make is to think that intensive grazing means you should graze the grasses in each small pasture really short before moving to the next pasture.

Sometimes severe or short grazing may be appropriate, but more often than not we want more grass leaves left behind after a move so it will regrow faster and be ready for another grazing sooner. Thus, it's the intensity of your management that enables you to meet your grazing goals.

Intensive grazing is a great tool when used correctly. Remember – it is management, not the defoliation, that is intensive. (SOURCE: Bruce Anderson, *Progressive Forage Grower*, June 11, 2014)

MINIMIZE ALFALFA YIELD LOSS DUE TO WHEEL TRAFFIC

Every time you harvest a field of alfalfa, as much as 70 percent of the plants are driven over by the equipment used to cut, rake, bale or chop, and remove the alfalfa from the field. During an entire year, some plants may be driven over 10 times.

All this wheel traffic has to cause some damage, but how much? When fields are dry, studies from multiple states consistently show that yields are reduced 5 to 8 percent within the wheel tracks at the next cutting if wheel tracks occur within a couple days of cutting and before new regrowth occurs.

But driving on these plants just five to seven days after cutting, when regrowth shoots have started to grow, reduces yield 15 to 25 percent or more. Furthermore, survival of these plants is reduced. However, driving over the same plants a second or third time on the same day caused about the same change in survival or yield as driving over them just once.

This research shows that the major cause of reduced yield due to wheel traffic is the breaking off of new regrowth stems. However, when fields are wet, wheel traffic causes much more compaction. When this happens, yield loss typically exceeds 30 percent.

To reduce yield losses caused by wheel traffic:

1. Harvest as quickly as possible after cutting.
 - Make silage or wrapped bales instead of dry hay.
 - Use conditioners and make wide swaths for faster drying.
 - Rake within two days of cutting and merge swaths into large windrows.
2. Minimize trips across the field.
 - Mow and condition in one trip.
 - Collect and drop bales at field edges.
 - Drive on same path and remove bales as soon as possible.
 - Do not drive on field between harvests.
3. Plant alfalfa varieties that are more traffic tolerant.
4. Avoid dual wheels.
5. Consider using larger equipment if it will reduce trips over the field.
6. Use the lightest equipment (like tractors) needed to complete the job.
7. Adjust equipment so wheels trail one another.

Alfalfa fields must be driven on during harvest, but you can lessen the damage by controlling where, when and how often you drive. (SOURCE: Bruce Anderson, *Progressive Forage Grower*, June 19, 2014)

GRAZING SUDANGRASS, PEARL MILLET AND SORGHUM HYBRIDS

Summer annual grasses planted this spring soon could be ready to graze. Let's review some grazing guidelines to help you avoid any potential hazards or problems.

It's been said that rules are meant to be broken. One rule, though, that I suggest you never break is this one: never turn hungry animals into sudangrass or sorghum-sudan pastures. Why? Because they may eat so rapidly that they could get a quick overdose of prussic acid and die.

All sudangrass and sorghum-sudan hybrids can produce a compound called prussic acid that is potentially poisonous. Prussic acid, which also is called cyanide, is nothing to fear, though, as long as you use a few precautions to avoid problems.

The highest concentration of prussic acid is in new shoots, so let your grass get a little growth on it before grazing to help dilute out the prussic acid. Let sudangrass get at least 18 inches in height before grazing. Since sorghum-sudan hybrids usually have a little more prussic acid risk, wait until they are 20 to 24 inches tall.

Pearl millet does not contain prussic acid so if you planted millet these grazing precautions aren't needed. Let your animals graze pearl millet when it reaches 12 to 15 inches tall.

Summer annual grasses respond best to a simple, rotational grazing system. Divide fields into three or more smaller paddocks of a size that your animals can graze down to about eight or so inches of leafy stubble within 7 to 10 days. Repeat this procedure with all paddocks. If some grass gets too tall, either cut it for hay or rotate animals more quickly so grass doesn't head out.

A well-planned start, a good rotation, and a little rain can give you good pasture from these grasses all the rest of the summer. (SOURCE: Bruce Anderson, *University of Nebraska-Lincoln*)

ALFALFA ACRES UP 2.4%; ALL-HAY DOWN

Timely spring rains, in areas, help boost production

U.S. hay growers will likely harvest more alfalfa and alfalfa-mix dry hay acres in 2014 – an increase of 2.4% totaling 18.2 million acres. That compares to 17.8 million alfalfa acres produced in 2013, according to USDA's [June 30 Acreage report](#).

But a 3% decrease in other hay acres, totaling 39.5 million acres, is expected to be harvested this year compared to that produced in 2013. On average, all-hay acreage will decrease by 1%, from 58.25 million acres last year to 57.65 million in 2014.

The expected increase in alfalfa acres can be attributed to timely spring precipitation throughout the Upper Midwest and Northern Plains, according to the USDA report. The biggest acreage gains are likely in New Mexico, by 52% to 220,000 acres; Oklahoma, by 35% to 310,000 acres; Wyoming, by 20% to 540,000 acres; and by 15% in Colorado and in Washington, to 750,000 and 470,000 acres, respectively.

North Dakota alfalfa acreage will decline about 5% to 1.54 million acres, down from 1.62 million acres in 2013.

Virginia growers will only harvest 75,000 acres of alfalfa and alfalfa mixtures, a 17% decline from 90,000 acres harvested last year. Oregon, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey and New York will see alfalfa acreage declines as well.

All-hay record high acreages are predicted in Oklahoma and Florida, according to the report. All-hay record lows are predicted for Nebraska, Maryland, Vermont and Rhode Island. (SOURCE: *Hay & Forage Grower*, July 8, 2014)

UPCOMING EVENTS

- SEPT 18-20 National Hay Association Annual Convention, Memphis, TN
- SEPT 22-27 Mountain Ag Week, UK Robinson Center, Jackson
- SEPT 25 Beef Bash, U.K. Research & Education Center, Princeton
- OCT 23 15th Kentucky Grazing Conference, Western Kentucky University Expo Center, Bowling Green
- NOV 18-20 Alfalfa Intensive Training Seminar, Bloomington, MN
- 2015**
- JAN 11-13 American Forage & Grassland Council Conference, St. Louis, MO
- JAN 16-17 20th Forages at KCA, KCA Convention, Owensboro
- FEB 26 35th "Anniversary" Kentucky Alfalfa Conference, Cave City Convention Center, Cave City, KY


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