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FORAGE NEWS

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

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

KENTUCKY ALFALFA AWARDS

The Kentucky Alfalfa Awards Program was initiated in 2000 at the 20th Anniversary of the Kentucky Alfalfa Conference. The Awards Program is funded annually from revenues generated each year for the Silent Auction during the Annual Conference.

The 2007 recipients were Bill Payne, Dan Grigson, and Bret Winsett. Congratulations to each and thanks for their many contributions to our Alfalfa Industry.

Year	Warren Thompson Industry Award	Charlie Schnitzler Producer Award	Garry D. Lacefield Public Service Award
2007	Bret Winsett	Bill Payne	Dan Grigson
2006	Scott Cooper	George Eckler	Laurie Lawrence
2005	Barney Booher	Roy Reichenbach	Ken Johnson
2004	Gary Coughlin	Minos Cox	Mike Collins
2003	Phil Howell	Lee Robey	Monroe Rasnake Jimmy Henning
2002	Tom Keene	John Nowak	Billy Ray Smith
2001	Bill Talley	Larry Jeffries	Timothy H. Taylor W. C. Templeton, Jr.
2000	Warren Thompson	Sue Schnitzler*	Garry Lacefield

*Accepted on behalf of her father who was tragically killed in a farming accident on March 11, 1991.

27TH KENTUCKY ALFALFA CONFERENCE

The 27th Kentucky Alfalfa Conference was held February 22 at the Cave City Convention Center. Participants heard leading speakers discuss topics ranging from "how to find alfalfa information on the web to Roundup Ready Alfalfa". Alfalfa Awards and Hay Awards highlighted the luncheon business meeting. Our thanks to all participants, sponsors, exhibitors, speakers and supporters for a most successful conference.

2006 HAY CONTEST WINNERS

Alfalfa & Grass		Alfalfa	
Month	**Winner**	**Month**	**Winner**
May	Odie Lockard	May	Rick Horn
June	George Harp	June	Chris Milam
July	Tom Peterson	July	Steve Farmer
August	Loraine Staples	August	David Glover
September	Chuck Heil	September	Tom Flowers
		Best Overall: Champion Alfalfa Hay - David Glover	

THE MERITS OF HIGH-CAPACITY MOWERS, ALFALFA ROTATIONS

The latest in mowing equipment as well as the benefits of using alfalfa within a crop rotation were two of many presentations made to members of three organizations last week at Wisconsin Dells.

The annual meetings of the Wisconsin Custom Operators, Midwest Forage Association and Professional Nutrient Applicators Association of Wisconsin were combined into a two-day workshop.

At one session, high-capacity self-propelled mowers were critiqued. University of Wisconsin ag engineer Kevin Shinners' list of advantages: they offer better cutting management, require fewer people and machines, and maintain capacity at slower speeds as compared to smaller machines.

Some of the disadvantages of these machines: the capital outlay; that those with dedicated tractors on the power units can be justified only through high annual usage; and the fact that, if such a machine breaks down, all cutting stops.

Hay growers who may want to add a high-capacity self-propelled mower to their lineup should realize that any labor savings from buying such a machine will be lost if its cost is 10% more than the purchase of two tractor windrowers, Shinners said.

At another session, UW forage specialist Dan Undersander advocated keeping alfalfa in crop rotations. His reasons:

1) Alfalfa provides legume (nitrogen) credits to other crops in a rotation (for more on the subject, watch for the March issue of *Hay & Forage Grower*).
2) Alfalfa, as well as grasses and other legumes, break disease and insect cycles. And alfalfa can reduce nematodes for succeeding crops.
3) Alfalfa improves soil condition. Its deep roots make channels into the soil for water and biotic movement after the roots have died.
4) Alfalfa in a rotation increases the yield of the next crop. University research shows that corn, corn silage, wheat and canola all yield more following alfalfa than following themselves.
5) Perennial crops reduce erosion because of their continual ground cover.
6) A deep-rooted crop like alfalfa reduces nitrate loss and removes deep nitrogen.
7) A hay crop in a grain rotation can help control weeds for succeeding crops.

(SOURCE: eHay Weekly, February 6, 2007)

BIOTECH TRAITS CAN IMPROVE ALFALFA

Several biotech traits currently being tested and developed in alfalfa could enhance its value, says Mark McCaslin, Forage Genetics International. "It's an exciting time for those involved in alfalfa improvement," McCaslin says. "We see significant potential for new traits to increase forage yield, improve forage quality and/or increase the role of alfalfa in animal diets." Two such developments are:

Reduced-lignin alfalfa -- McCaslin says alfalfa with less lignin may provide more flexibility in harvest management and increase forage quality and possibly yield. Noble Foundation scientists have learned how to "turn off" most of the genes that help form lignin in alfalfa and, by doing so, increase its digestibility. "Field studies of reduced-lignin alfalfa show it works," he says. "Now a dairy feeding study is under way. We may be able to offer reduced-lignin alfalfa to the market around the year 2012."

Tannin alfalfa -- Although alfalfa produces condensed tannins in its seed coat, researchers are working to also produce those tannins in its leaves and stems. Tannin-containing forages bind with proteins and help slow the rate of protein degradation in the rumen. They're also non-bloating. "The U.S. Dairy Forage Research Center estimates that

tannin alfalfa could decrease protein feed supplement costs for dairy operations by 60% and decrease nitrogen losses to the environment by around 25%," McCaslin says. "Our team is fairly confident we could have tannin alfalfa plants developed and ready for research this year."

Several biotech companies are also exploring and testing input traits that would increase drought tolerance and water-use efficiency and delay flowering in alfalfa, McCaslin adds. "These new transgenes may offer an opportunity to significantly increase forage yield in alfalfa," he notes. He talked about the new developments as part of the recent Western Alfalfa and Forage Conference in Reno, NV. *(SOURCE: Dr. Mark McCaslin IN eHay Weekly, January 23, 2007)*

Newly Updated: Grain and Forage Crop Guide for KY

We have just updated the popular "Grain and Forage Crop Guide for KY" or AGR-18. This publication lists all the forage and grain crops grown in KY and information on planting rate, planting date, yield potential, etc. This has long been one of the most popular extension publications for producers and county agents in the state. Go to www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage and click on publications to download your updated copy today.

New Publication: Long Term Variety Test Summary

Last month we mentioned that we were now including a long term summary at the end of each variety test report. We have now put all of these summaries for all forage species into one publication. We anticipate that this will become one of the most used forage publications. Use this summary report to narrow down the variety to plant and then refer to the individual report for more detailed information. The summary report is named "2006 Long Term Summary of Kentucky Forage Variety Trials" and labeled PR-550.

AFGC Will Hold Its Annual Meeting This June in Pennsylvania

Elmhurst, Illinois, February 23, 2007—The American Forage and Grassland Council (AFGC) will host its Annual Meeting June 24-26, State College, Pennsylvania, at Penn Stater Conference Center and Hotel. The event is being co-sponsored by the Pennsylvania Forage and Grassland Council and the Northeastern Branch of the American Society of Agronomy, Crop and Soil Sciences.

According to AFGC President Bill Talley with Summit Seed Coatings in Princeton, Kentucky, the event will feature symposia, scientific posters, student contests, tours, exhibits and networking designed to advance the knowledge and use of forage as a prime feed resource. It is attended by forage and livestock producers, agribusiness, and research, extension, and teaching faculty in crop and animal sciences, agricultural engineering, and other affiliated disciplines.

Marvin Hall, who is the conference chair and a faculty member of the Department of Crop & Soil Sciences at Penn State University, says, “This gathering is the place to be for learning about this important agricultural resource and to share experiences and information with colleagues and friends.”

Details and registration are available on the web at www.afgc.org. Or, contact AFGC at 1.800.944.2342 for information or questions.

The American Forage and Grassland Council is an organization made up of more than 20 affiliate councils with a total membership of about 2,500. Founded in 1944, its primary objective is to promote the profitable production and sustainable utilization of quality forage and grasslands. Contact AFGC, 350 Poplar Ave., Elmhurst, IL 60126. Telephone 800.944.2342. Fax 630.359.4274. E-mail info@afgc.org. www.afgc.org. *(SOURCE: AFGC News Release, 2-19-2007)*

Increase in Alfalfa Acreage & Yield

Alfalfa hay production was estimated at 1.04 million tons, up 25 percent from the previous year. This would be the largest production since 1996. Yield per acre was estimated at 3.7 tons per acre, up 0.5 tons from 2005. Harvested acreage at 280,000 acres was the largest in four years. Other hay production was estimated at 5.28 million tons, up 7 percent from the 2005 crop. Yield was estimated at 2.4 tons per acre, an increase of 0.1 tons per acre. Crop conditions were mostly favorable this year. Frequent showers benefited growth while delaying harvest and drying in some areas. *(SOURCE: Kentucky Agri-News, Vol. No. 26, Issue No. 2, January 2007)*

Conversion from Corn to Grassland Provides Economic and Environmental Benefits to a Maryland Beef Farm

Simulation of a beef producing farm in Maryland showed that converting from a corn-based production system to a perennial grassland system with rotational grazing provided both environmental and economic benefits. Simulated N loss through ammonia volatilization increased some, but nitrate leaching, denitrification loss, and surface runoff loss of P were reduced substantially. The conversion increased the annual net return of the farm by $18,800 by eliminating the greater machinery, fuel, seed, fertilizer, and chemical costs incurred in corn production. These potential benefits should encourage more producers and those advising producers in the northeast and mid Atlantic regions to consider greater use of grassland in beef production systems where corn currently has a major role. *(SOURCE: Paul Crosson, C. Alan Rotz, and Matt A. Sanderson, USDA_ARS, University Park, PA IN Plant Management Network, January 19, 2007)*

Disc, Sickle Mowers Both Have Pluses

If you're in the market for a mower this year, you may want to weigh the pros and cons of disc vs. sickle cutterbars, says Dan Undersander, University of Wisconsin forage specialist.

But don't agonize over your decision, because there is no difference in alfalfa yield or persistence between the two types of mower conditioners, according to past research by Undersander. He lists several advantages of each implement.

Disc mowers have faster ground speed; cut better in lodged, tangled crops; cut fine-stem grasses better; cut through gopher mounds and ant hills; and require less time for knife replacement. Disc mowers also need fewer repairs — 20-30% less maintenance than sicklebars.

Sicklebar mowers, on the other hand, cost about 10-20%/ft less, require around 30% less horsepower and cost less in repairs if the mower hits something.

But what about stand health? “Disc mowers leave a rougher cut. But if you have a good variety with a high level of disease resistance, that's not an issue,” Undersander says. *(SOURCE: Hay & Forage Grower Magazine, February 2007)*

Kentucky Farm Numbers

Kentucky estimated that 84,000 farms operated in the State in the past year. This is unchanged from 2005. A farm is defined as “any establishment from which $1,000 or more of agricultural products were sold or would normally be sold during the year”. Total sales include government payments. Farm numbers include properties with acres enrolled in the Conservation or Wetland Reserve government programs. Research and institutional farms are included in the farm definition. Kentucky farms were placed into 5 sales categories: 53,000 with sales of $1,000-$9,999; 25,000 with sales of $10,000-$99,999; 3,400 with sales of $100,000-$249,999; 1,450 with sales of $250,000-$499,999; and 1,150 with sales of $500,000 or more. Kentucky had the fourth highest number of farms in the Nation. Number one Texas had 230,000, Missouri had 105,000, and Iowa had 88,600. There were 13.7 million acres of land in farms for 2006. Urban encroachment upon less profitable farms and the tobacco buy-out help explain the 100,000 acres decline from last year. Of the approximate 25.4 million total acres in Kentucky, 53.9 percent if farmland. The average farm size was 163 acres, an acre less than it was last year. *(SOURCE: Kentucky Agri-News, Vol. 26, No. 4, Feb. 2007)*

Upcoming Events

MAY 30-JUN 1	Southern Pasture & Forage Crop Improvement Conference, Tallahassee, FL
JUN 24-27	American Forage & Grassland Council Annual Meeting, State College, PA
JUL 26	UK All Commodity Field Day, UKREC, Princeton
2008	
JAN 26-FEB 1	SRM/AFGC Forage Conference, Louisville

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