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Forage News [2004-05]

Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, University of Kentucky

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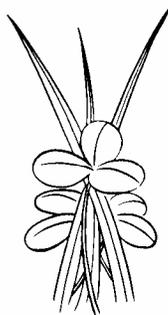
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FORAGE NEWS

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

MAY 2004

Garry D. Lacefield, Extension Forage Specialist • Christi Forsythe, Secretary

KFGC FIELD DAY

The KFGC Field Day will be held June 24, 2004 at the Russell Hackley Farm in Grayson County, Kentucky. The program committee has selected the theme "Moving Forward with Rotational Grazing." The farm will be an excellent site to address and show results of what can happen when rotational grazing is implemented.

The field day will begin at 4:30 Central Time and the tour will start at 4:45. Five stops are planned for the tour:

Stop	Topic	Speaker
1	Benefits of Rotational Grazing	Dr. Garry Lacefield
2	Water Systems for Rotational Grazing	Mr. Kevin Laurent
3	Fencing Systems for Rotational Grazing	Mr. Ken Johnson
4	Can We Grazing Year-Round in Kentucky?	Dr. Jimmy Henning
5	Making Rotational Grazing Work on My Farm	Mr. Russell Hackley

Following the tour, a delicious "burger" meal with all the trimmings will be served by the Grayson County Cattleman Association. Mr. Tom Keene, President of the American Forage & Grassland Council will be the Keynote Speaker.

More information, including directions to the Field Day site will be in next months Forage News and on our Website at www.uky.edu/Ag/Forage

AMERICAN FORAGE & GRASSLAND COUNCIL TO MEET IN VIRGINIA

The American Forage and Grassland Council will hold their Annual Conference at the Hotel Roanoke & Convention Center in Roanoke, Virginia June 12-14, 2004. Conference organizers have selected the theme "Farmers, Forages and the Future". Kentucky will be well represented with our own Tom Keene as President along with Ken Johnson and Bill Talley as Vice Presidents. Several from Kentucky are serving on the board of directors, while others are featured as invited speakers and committee members. For more information on this important Forage Educational Event, visit the AFGC Website at: <http://www.afgc.org>

RED MEAT PRODUCTION IN 2003

Red meat production for the United States totaled 46.8 billion pounds in 2003, 1.2 percent below last year's record high. Red meat includes beef, veal, pork, and lamb and mutton. Red meat production in commercial plants totaled 46.6 billion pounds. On farm production totaled 136 million pounds.

Beef production, at 26.3 billion pounds, was 3 percent below the previous record high set last year. Veal production totaled 201.1 million pounds, down 2 percent from last year, and set a new record low. Pork production, at 20.0 billion pounds, was 2 percent above last year, setting a new record high. Lamb and mutton production totaled 203.4 million pounds, falling 9 percent below the previous record low set a year ago.

Commercial cattle slaughter during 2003 totaled 35.5 million head, down 1 percent from 2002, with federal inspection comprising 98.3 percent of the total. The average live weight was 1,231 pounds, down 20 pounds from a year ago. Steers comprised 49.2 percent of the total federally inspected slaughter, heifers 31.7 percent, dairy cows 8 percent, other cows 9.1 percent, and bulls 1.8 percent.

Commercial calf slaughter totaled 1.0 million head, down 4 percent from a year ago with 97.5 percent under federal inspection. The average live weight was 318 pounds, up 6 pounds from a year earlier.

Commercial hog slaughter totaled 100.9 million head, up 1 percent from 2002, with 98.8 percent of the hogs slaughtered under federal inspection. The average live weight was up 1 pound from last year, at 266 pounds. Barrows and gilts comprised 96.5 percent of the total federally inspected slaughter.

Commercial sheep and lamb slaughter, totaled 2.98 million head, was down 9 percent from 2002 with 94.2 percent comprised by federal inspection. The average live weight was up 1 pound from 2002 to 134 pounds.

Red meat production in Kentucky during 2003 totaled 471.6 million pounds, up 5 percent from the 2002 level. Beef production totaled 16.8 million pounds live weight, 16 percent above the 2002 level. Pork production, at 616 million pounds live weight was 5 percent above the previous year. Lamb and mutton

production, at 1.43 million pounds live weight, was 8 percent above the 2002 total. During 2003, animals were slaughtered at 59 plants in Kentucky, of which 23 were under federal inspection. (SOURCE: *Kentucky Agri-News*, Vol. #23, No. 6, March 2004)

ALFALFA

Remains of alfalfa more than 6000 years old were found in Iran. The oldest writings about alfalfa are from Turkey, dating 1300 B.C. Alfalfa was probably domesticated near Turkmenistan, Iran, Turkey, the Caucasus regions, and other regions in Asia Minor.

Alfalfa was important to the early Babylonian cultures, and to the Persians, Greeks, and Romans because of its importance for feeding horses used in war. The name "alfalfa" comes from Arabic, Persian, and Kashmiri words meaning "best horse fodder" and "horse power."

The eastern United States colonists, including Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, grew alfalfa on a few acres. However, it was not widely grown in this country until the California Gold Rush of 1849. Horses, beef and milk cows were valuable, and everything was animal-powered. From California, alfalfa spread eastward to Nevada, Utah, Kansas, and Nebraska. Today, alfalfa is grown on 23 million acres from coast to coast.

Varieties – Many alfalfa varieties are available to growers. Those that tolerate freezing are grown in northern United States and Canada. Other varieties continue to grow during the winter months in areas such as southern California and Arizona where growers harvest up to 12 months of the year. Alfalfa breeders have developed many varieties of alfalfa that are highly resistant to diseases and insect pests, thereby reducing the need for pesticides.

Commodity Value – Among United States crops, alfalfa is third in value, after corn and soybeans. Its national value is more than \$8 billion each year, not including the value of dairy products. In California, alfalfa is planted on more than one million acres and has a value of about \$1 billion annually.

Alfalfa is an important rotational crop since it adds nitrogen to the soil and improves the soil structure for future crops. Nodules on alfalfa roots contain bacteria that take nitrogen gas from the air and convert it to nitrogen plants can use. This process is called nitrogen fixation. The exact financial value of this soil improvement is not calculated, but is significant. Wildlife use alfalfa fields for food and shelter, including over 130 bird species. For many animals, including endangered species, alfalfa fields are their preferred habitat. (SOURCE: *Dr. Dan Putnam, University of California-Davis*)

BALING FORAGE CROPS FOR SILAGE

Round bale silage (balage) is the product of cutting forage crops with conventional hay harvesting equipment, allowing the forage to wilt to between 40 and 60 percent moisture, baling the forage into tight bales, and quickly wrapping the bales in plastic so that oxygen is excluded. The forage in the wrapped bale then goes through the ensiling process. The plastic wrap keeps air out, allowing anaerobic microorganisms to ferment carbohydrates to lactic acid which inhibits the growth of

other detrimental microorganisms. The ensiling process uses some energy, but this loss is small compared to dry matter losses that results from raking, tedding, baling and storing round bales outside as hay.

Advantages of balage include: production of higher quality feed, reduced harvest and storage losses, reduced weather damage, reduced capital investment compared to conventional silage, plastic cost per bale is low (about \$3.00), balage does not require specialized equipment, reduces curing time by up to 50% over hay making and results in a savings of 20% or more of the leaves that are typically lost during haymaking.

Disadvantages include: plastic cost, wrapping equipment, handling heavier bales (more water), holes (punctures) in plastic during storage, and disposal of plastic.

There are many ways to seal freshly baled forage including: individual bags, tubing machines, and individual or group wrapped bales. The most common methods are either platform wrappers or in-line wrappers. Platform wrappers wrap individual bales and in-line wrappers line bales end to end and wrap all bales with one continuous piece of plastic. Each method will offer some advantages and disadvantages but both can be used successfully in preserving high moisture forage or balage.

The following TIPS can increase success with balage:

1. Produce as high quality forage as possible.
2. Harvest at an early stage of maturity.
3. Wrap between 50 and 60% moisture.
4. Make dense, tight bales – uniform bales are very important for in-line wrappers.
5. Wrap bales soon after baling.
6. Wrap bales with 4-6 layers of good quality plastic.
7. Use natural fiber or plastic twine. Sisal twine can damage plastic.
8. Store bales in a convenience place on a well drained site.
9. Patch holes using UV-protected plastic tape.
10. Match quality to animal nutritional needs at feeding and feed soon after removing plastic.

(SOURCE: *Garry Lacefield & Mike Collins, University of Kentucky*)

UPCOMING EVENTS

- JUN 12-16 American Forage & Grassland Council, Roanoke, VA
- JUN 18-19 Southeastern Farm & Home Expo '04, Greeneville, TN
- JUN 24 KFGC Field Day, Russell Hackley Farm, Grayson County
- OCT 3-5 Fourth Eastern Native Grass Symposium, Lexington
- OCT 26 5th Kentucky Grazing Conference, Bowling Green
- 2005**
- FEB 24 25th Kentucky Alfalfa Conference, Cave City Convention Center



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May 2004