



2-1-2001

Forage News [2001-02]

University of Kentucky Department of Plant and Soil Sciences

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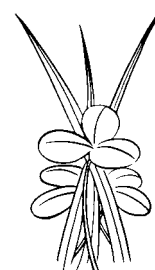
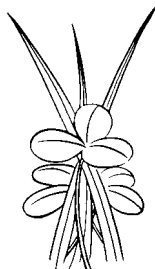
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University of Kentucky Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, "Forage News [2001-02]" (2001). *Forage News*. 205.
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FORAGE NEWS



In this month's issue:

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- How Much Are Better Alfalfa Varieties Worth?
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February 2001

Garry D. Lacefield and Jimmy C. Henning, Extension Forage Specialists • Christi Forsythe, Secretary

21ST KENTUCKY ALFALFA CONFERENCE

The 21st Kentucky Alfalfa Conference will be held **March 1, 2001** at the Cave City Convention Center. Registration begins at 8:00 a.m. with the program getting underway at 9:00. A full slate of exhibits will be on hand to discuss products and services related to alfalfa production, utilization and marketing. Again this year, we will have many items available through the silent auction. Keynote speakers for this year's conference include Dr. Neal Martin, Director of the USDA Dairy Forage Research Center in Madison, Wisconsin, and Dr. Gary Bates, Extension Forage Specialist, University of Tennessee. The \$15.00 registration fee includes proceedings and other printed materials, refreshments and lunch. The program includes:

- 9:00 Welcome
- 9:15 Can We Follow Alfalfa With Alfalfa - Dr. Monroe Rasnake
- 9:30 AM-PM Cutting - Which is Best for Kentucky - Dr. Garry Lacefield
- 9:45 Round Bale Silage - Dr. Mike Collins
- 10:15 Break
- 10:30 Establishing Alfalfa Using No-till Techniques - Dr. Gary Bates
- 11:15 Alfalfa Hay Quality-Sampling-Testing-Marketing - Dr. Neal Martin
- 12:00 Lunch, Visit Exhibits, Silent Auction
- 12:45 Awards - Silent Auction Results
- 1:00 Grazing Alfalfa - Is it Right for You? - Dr. Jimmy Henning
- 1:15 Reducing the Risk of Bloat - Dr. Patty Scharko
- 1:30 Alfalfa for Horses - Dr. Laurie Lawrence
- 1:45 Alfalfa for Dairy - Dr. Donna A. Phillips
- 2:00 Alfalfa for Beef - Dr. Roy Burris
- 2:15 Alfalfa as a Cash Hay Crop - Mr. John Nowak
- 2:30 Adjourn

PASTURE RENOVATION

Research and farmer experience over the past twenty-five years has shown the importance of forage legumes in grass pasture and hay fields. Establishing legumes into grass can increase yield, improve quality and we take advantage of these legumes unique ability to fix nitrogen. Time is rapidly approaching to seed legumes into our pastures. Principles to increase our chances of success include: 1) supply adequate P, K and lime (do not use nitrogen on renovated fields), 2) use

certified seed of a recommended variety, 3) inoculate properly with viable inoculum, 4) use a seeding technique that permits uniform distribution and correct rate, and 5) control competition from existing grass during establishment of newly seeded legumes.

LOW PRICED CLOVERS ARE COSTING YOU PROFITS

Be careful of bargain on clover seed. There is a lot of cheap clover being sold out there labeled as common red clover or as uncertified Kenland clover. These are lower yielding varieties and they generally won't survive but one year or just ½ of the second year. Ask yourself this question, would distributors lose money selling you the clover as uncertified if they could prove it was a good Kenland clover? All they know is that it used to be Kenland clover but they didn't stop mutations, crossbreeding, and inbreeding, so now they can't say it's a true Kenland clover. This explains why they are so cheap.

The improved certified varieties will produce up to twice as much more hay and pasture and they are generally lasting in fields for at least 3 years. How can you justify sowing the cheaper seed? For \$5-8 per acre you can sow the best and double the amount of feed you produce and have the clover around an extra year. Make sure you know what you are buying. Just because the guy behind the counter tells you that the seed is o.k. doesn't mean he knows for sure because some of these clover marketers have done a real sales job on farmers and dealers. Before you take the seed home, read the label and make sure it is a variety adapted to Kentucky.

Make sure you are buying one of the newer and improved varieties. Buying the best will make you more money rather than costing you money. When you consider the extra yield and life of the stand, the extra hay value of the improved varieties is worth \$100-\$150 above the seed cost per acre. Contact your U.K. County Extension Office for information on our U.K. Forage Variety Test and recommendations for the best varieties. (SOURCE: Dan Grigson, Lincoln County Agricultural Extension Agent)

BUY CLOVER SEED WISELY

Don't waste your money on common medium red clover! Don't gamble on uncertified Kenland clover! Make the money-wise decision to buy the best!

Let me explain why you should not look at the price per pound only when you go to buy clover seed. I am going to do

this with \$\$ numbers.

	New Improved Red Clovers	Common red	Uncertified Kenland
2 yr yield avg tons/acre*	5.5 ton/acre	2.0 ton/acre	3.8 ton/acre
% stand 3 rd yr	85%	20%	43%
Value of hay at \$70/ton	\$385	\$140	\$266
Cost to seed 8 lb/acre	\$17	\$10	\$10
Income above seed cost	\$368	\$130	\$256

*Based on U.K. Variety Testing program results

This shows you why you can't afford to sow anything but the best clovers. The seed cost isn't important. What's important is the income you make for what you sow. Buying the cheap red clover will cost you over \$100 per acre per year as a result of lower yields. To make matters worse, the cheap clovers only last 1-2 years when most of the new clovers are generally lasting 3 years or more.

Don't let the person behind the counter sell you a common medium red or uncertified Kenland clover at a bargain price. Ask for and buy one of the moneymaking clovers that have yielded well and persisted well in our U.K. Variety tests. Stop by your U.K. County Extension Office and get a copy of the Variety Trail results and recommendations from your agent for the best clovers available to sow for your area. (SOURCE: Dan Grigson, Lincoln County Agricultural Extension Agent)

HOW MUCH ARE BETTER ALFALFA VARIETIES WORTH?

The economic value of a better alfalfa variety can be broken down into the components of yield, disease resistance (aphanomyces in this example), insect resistance (potato leafhopper in this example), grazing tolerance, and forage quality (varieties selected for higher CP, RFV or multifoliate trait). Two levels of economic value are possible when choosing a better variety for each major trait. The conservative value would be what you could expect every year. The conservative economic value of some traits can be zero, considering that under good management or low disease pressure, you would not expect an increased return from resistance to aphanomyces root rot or potato leafhopper. Yield, grazing tolerance, and forage quality are traits that can be expected to give returns more consistently.

Based on the assumptions noted above and in the table, choosing a better alfalfa variety should be worth from \$360 to a maximum of \$2122 over the life of the stand depending on the variety and the traits chosen (Table 10). If the difference in price for a better variety is about \$40 per acre, then clearly better varieties will pay.

Yield - Choosing a better alfalfa variety has a definite yield advantage. UK comparisons of the top 5 variety versus the checks for 4 different studies (based on summaries from 1999) found that the better varieties were worth an average of almost 1 ton (0.93 tons) of 15% moisture content hay per acre per year for every year of the stand (including the year of seeding). If alfalfa hay is valued at \$85 per ton, that makes a better variety of alfalfa worth on average \$79 per year or \$415 over the life of the stand.

Multiple Pest Resistance:

Diseases (Aphanomyces Root Rot Example) - Estimated value in severe outbreak: The cost of reseeding (\$60 for seed and \$20 for land preparation) and loss of one year's production (\$350). Total value of better variety: \$430.

Estimated value of a mild outbreak: The cost of one extra herbicide application (\$30/A) plus the loss of one ton of hay per

acre (\$85). Total value of better variety: \$115.

Potato Leafhopper - Estimated value with economically damaging levels of PLH: Annual yield loss: 0.6 tons of hay at \$85/ton: \$51/Acre plus savings in insecticide spraying and insect scouting (\$30). Total Value: \$81/year or \$405 for 5 year stand life.

Grazing Tolerance - Estimated value of a grazing tolerant variety: One or two more years of production @ \$350/year or \$350 to \$700/A.

Forage Quality - Estimated value of a better alfalfa variety from forage quality: \$4.25/ton higher hay prices for 4.5 tons/year or \$19 per year (\$95 over life of stand).

Total Value

Summary of the value of better alfalfa varieties over the life of the stand.			
Trait	Conservative Value	Potential Value	Comments
Yield	\$360	\$492	
Disease Resistance Aphanomyces Root Rot	\$0	\$430	Value depends on severity of disease pressure
Insect Resistance Potato Leafhopper	\$0	\$405	Value depends on insect pressure and also on yield potential of variety
Grazing Tolerance	\$350	\$700	Value is based on one or two extra years of production (\$350 per year).
Forage Quality	\$95	\$95	Based on the value of hay that is 5 units higher in RFV, \$0.85 per unit of RFV per ton, 4.5 tons per year, 5 year stand life.

UPCOMING EVENTS

FEB 10-21 International Grassland Congress, Brazil
 MAR 1 21st Kentucky Alfalfa Conference, Cave City
 MAR 6 Central Alfalfa Conference, Lexington
 APR 17-19 Grazing School, Springfield

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