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FORAGE NEWS

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

FORAGES AT THE STATE FAIR

UK and the Kentucky Department of Agriculture are co-hosting a seminar entitled “Quality Makes the Difference” on Thursday, August 20 and Friday, August 21 in the West Hall of the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center. The program runs from 10:00 to 10:45 AM. The speakers and topics are Garry Lacefield (Factors affecting forage quality), Jimmy Henning (Evaluating and interpreting hay test results), and Allen Johnson (Advantages of hay testing).

LATE SUMMER SEEDING TIPS

Late summer is a great time for establishing cool season forage crops. Both grasses and legumes can be established at this time. The keys to any good forage seeding are a fine, firm seedbed, addressing soil fertility needs, planting the seed in good contact with the soil, and getting this done in a timely fashion.

Late summer and early fall is without a doubt the best time of the year to seed forage grasses. Seeding by early September will help to insure that the grasses will be large enough to withstand the winter cold and the freezing and thawing of the soil. Grasses can be seeded by broadcasting followed by cultipacking, using a Brillion seeder, or by drilling with any drill. Take great care not to seed it deeper than 1/4 to 1/2 inch. When using drills (either grain drills or no-till), it is acceptable to take the drop tubes out of the disc openers and just drop seed on top of the ground if followed by cultipacking the field.

Seedings of red clover and alfalfa can be made in late summer, but pay attention to the following recommendations to maximize chances of success. Soil fertility needs for legumes, especially for pH are higher than for grasses. Soil pH is very important for phosphorus availability and for proper nodulation. Soil pH should be from 6.4 to 7 for good legume establishment.

Sclerotinia crown and stem rot is a serious concern in fall seedings of alfalfa especially, but also red clover. Sclerotinia inoculum comes from any fields that have had clover or alfalfa in them in the past. Areas that have had sclerotinia in the past are at greater risk for this disease. Sclerotinia infection starts in the extended cool wet days of late fall and early winter and typically takes most or all of the stand by next spring. It may only kill circular areas in the field.

The risks of sclerotinia can be minimized by early

planting and moldboard plowing. Early planting allows the alfalfa plant to develop its natural resistance to sclerotinia. While there is no ‘magic date’ to define early planting, getting the alfalfa stand seeded and up by late August will be much better than mid to late September.

Moldboard plowing buries the surface litter, which is where the infectious material for this disease comes from. Discing is acceptable, but moldboard plowing would be better. No-till seedings of alfalfa are not recommended because of the heightened risk of sclerotinia.

There is some varietal resistance to sclerotinia reported from trials at Ohio State University. Specifically, WL332SR and Cimarron 3i both have shown some resistance to sclerotinia in these trials. However, small plot research work by Paul Vincelli at UK and field scale plots conducted by David Herbst in Adair County have shown that this resistance is not enough to withstand a severe outbreak of sclerotinia. The bottom line: Do not depend on varietal resistance to give 100% protection from sclerotinia.

APPLYING MANURE TO FORAGE CROPS

Animal manures can be a good source of nutrients for forage crops in Kentucky. Manures can be applied to forage fields about anytime during the growing season. Also, many hay and pasture fields need the phosphate and potassium contained in manures as well as the nitrogen.

For good utilization of nutrients and reduced risk of environmental problems, some basic guidelines should be followed when applying animal manures:

1. Use application rates calculated to supply the nutrient needs of the crop. Never apply manure at rates higher than needed to supply the nitrogen taken up by the crop.
2. Apply manures close to the time the crop needs the nutrients. For cool season forages, this would be in late winter to early spring and again in late summer to early fall. Mid-spring to early summer would be best for warm season forages.
3. Do not apply manure on frozen or wet soils. Heavy rain could wash manure directly into streams. Also, wet soils can be compacted by the application equipment.
4. Do not spread manure in or near streams, sinkholes or water wells to avoid direct contamination of water.

