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Forage News [2019-02]

Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, University of Kentucky

Forage News

Keeping Forage-Livestock producers in Kentucky informed
Dr. S. Ray Smith and Krista Lea, MS.~ Editors
February 2019

Anne Bays Wins Second in National Contest

Anne Bays, co-owner and operator of Moonlight farms in Corbin KY, won second place in the National Forage Spokesperson Contest at the recent meeting of the American Forage and Grassland Council. Anne was selected to represent KY at the Oct. Grazing Conference, co-hosted by the KFGC and University of Kentucky. As the Kentucky winner, Anne went on to the national AFGC competition in St. Louis Missouri on January 7, 2019. At the national contest, Anne placed second in a highly competitive field of six speakers from across the central and eastern US.

Anne and her husband, John, own and operate Moonlight Farm, a family farm that focuses on producing grass fed/grass finished beef, pastured pork, and free range chicken. Their beef comes from Scottish Highland Cattle, and is USDA Certified Grass Fed. They also raise and sell meat from Red Wattle Hogs and free-range chickens. They market their meat through local farmers markets, as a CSA farm. They have recently purchased a meat processing operation and storefront to market their products. For more info go to: https://www.facebook.com/MoonlightFarmLLC/ ~ Jimmy Henning

Kentucky has raised many forage leaders now working around the country. Other KY resident and KY natives recognized at the AFGC Conference include:
Krista Lea—Early Career Award
Don Ball—Allen Illumination Award
Scott Flynn—Merit Award
Jennifer Tucker—Merit Award

Looks Like I Need that Hay after all

The cold and wet weather this winter is a reminder that stored feed is important to livestock operations. Plan to attend the 38th annual Alfalfa and Stored Forages Conference February 21 in Lexington. The program will focus on the practical considerations for the production of high quality hay and baleage. UK Ag Economist Dr. Greg Halich will address the economics of hay and stored feed and David Knopf (USDA Ag Statistics) will be updating the group on state and national hay prices and trends.

The infrastructure of hay making will also be highlighted. Dr. Josh Jackson (UK) will provide an update on hay making equipment and technology and Dr. Morgan Hayes will address barn considerations for cash hay operations. Josh and Morgan are UK Extension Specialists in Ag Engineering and produce hay on their own farms. These are new faculty at UK that are bringing fresh information to producers and you won't want to miss them.

Producer speakers will play a significant role in this year's conference. Ron Tombaugh will walk us through the evolution of mechanization and transportation in his hay operation. Ron and Sandy Tombaugh own and operate Dart Hay Service (Streator, IL). Ron grows and harvests several hundred acres of alfalfa and alfalfa-grass hay annually and delivers hay using his own long haul trucks over the eastern half of the US, including KY.

Finally, a panel of producers will present how baleage works on their farm. Todd Clark (Lexington), Tom Wright (Shelbyville) and Jody Watson (Jackson, TN) will lead a panel discussion of how baleage works on their farm. Actual farm data on the quality of Kentucky baleage will be shared including moisture content, pH and fermentation profiles of the volatile fatty acids that preserve the baleage.

The 38th Annual Alfalfa and Stored Forages Conference will be held at the Fayette County Extension Office, 1140 Harry Sykes Way in Lexington. Register online at www.2019KYAlfalfa.eventbrite.com. Registration is $35 per person, with a $10 discount if done before February 15. Attendees can also get a $10 discount on the KFGC membership. Register now!
~ Dr. Jimmy Henning, excerpt from Farmer's Pride.

Forage Timely Tips: February

- ✓ Continue grazing stockpiled tall fescue if available.
- ✓ If pasture stands are thin, frost seed 6-8 lb/acre red clover and 1-2 lb/A white clover after close grazing.
- ✓ On low fertility pastures, consider adding 10-15 lb/A annual lespedeza to the above recommendation.
- ✓ Apply low rates of nitrogen in late February on some pastures to promote early growth.
- ✓ Service and calibrate no-till drills
- ✓ Apply lime and fertilizer according to soil test if not done in the fall.

Publication of the Month: Renovating Hay and Pasture Fields (AGR-26)

Renovate means to renew and improve. This publication discusses managing a pasture or hay field that has become less productive and renovating or "renewing" it so that it will become more productive. In

Kentucky, this usually means adding lime and fertilizer, controlling weeds, and planting an adapted legume such as red clover and/or ladino white clover. The primary benefits of renovation come as a result of getting legumes established in grass-dominated fields. See the full publication on the UK forage website or visit your local county extension office.

My Permanent Pastures Aren't

Mud is the price of feeding cattle outside over winter, especially the winter of 2018/2019. So what can be done to renovate or rehabilitate damaged grass pastures?

First, there is no easy or quick fix. The damaged pastures are going to need time out of production and some inputs. Let's take a look at some things you can do to help rehabilitate your pasture grass base.

Rest. I would have to put this at the top of any list. Without time off, the pasture will never be much more than mud and weeds. Ideally, this rest would extend beyond the rehabilitation period to future management. If these pastures have to go back into rotation, make it a priority to implement rotational grazing with extended rest periods. Longer rest periods allow the roots to recover as well as the tops.

Feeding somewhere else. Getting to state the obvious is a perk of old age, and feeding somewhere else is the pinnacle of obvious. However, doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result is a symptom of insanity by some. Other options?

Nitrogen. The strongest stimulant for grass growth is nitrogen. While legumes do supply nitrogen, for this problem we need to pull out the big guns and use fertilizer N for quickest results. Spring N will stimulate grass plants that are still vigorous and growing and will produce more yield per pound of N than at any other time, generally.

Assessment. Determine whether you have enough grass to warrant the N. Weeds are also stimulated by spring N, and we don't need more of those. Fall applied N will stimulate cool season grasses to initiate new tillers that will emerge next spring. The timing window for N application to stimulate tillering is wider and later than the optimum window for stockpiling fescue. October and November applications will be effective.

Planting something. Once the cattle have been removed, you have the opportunity to smooth up the area if needed and seed. The options include red and white clover, a summer annual or even an aggressive establishing cool season grass if done early. Clover will easily germinate and grow when broadcast onto bare soil given just a little rain or packing. The taproots can help loosen the soil as well.

My choice of the ryegrasses would be perennial ryegrass and not annual. Perennial is still a temporary fix but has a chance of lasting well into the season and maybe more. Annual ryegrass will often go to seed and die by mid-summer, unless an Italian type is used.

Summer annuals. Species such as crabgrass, sorghum-sudan, sudangrass and pearl millet can provide high yields and make good use of the residual N, P and K from the cattle. Plant these when the soils are warmer and the chance of frost has passed.

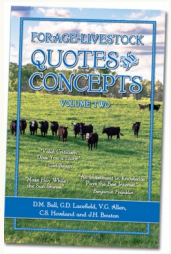
All the options above (clover, ryegrass or warm season annuals) are just temporary solutions, of course. Their purpose is to provide some pasture while bridging to the fall seeding window when seeding of more permanent cool season grasses are more successful.

There are as many ways to rehabilitate our permanent pastures as there are farms. Adding heavy use areas, unrolling hay across more area, and even bale grazing can help. But rest, nitrogen, feeding elsewhere and replanting are some of your most powerful tools for the job of bringing back the permanence in your pastures.

~ Dr. Jimmy Henning, excerpt of article in Farmers Pride

Quote of the Month: Establishment: Planning and Precision are Paramount

The importance of the establishment period for forage crops can hardly be overemphasized. In most cases, the steps involved in establishment are not particularly difficult to accomplish, but success usually involves planning, attention to detail and timeliness. Many things can go wrong. Cutting corners or skipping a step is likely to be costly in the long run. If a producer is going to make a mistake that will limit forage production throughout the life of a forage stand, the chances are good that it will be made between the time the decision to plant the crop was made and when the planter was pulled out of the field. Forage-Livestock Quotes and Concepts, vol. 2 is available online at foragequotebook.com.



Converting to Novel Endophyte Tall Fescue

I have the strong opinion that nearly all progressive livestock growers with Kentucky-31 tall fescue pastures should convert at least some of their ground to novel endophyte fescue. While I am still a big fan of KY-31 for winter grazing, hay production, etc., having novel endophyte tall fescue for young and growing animals, and other high-value livestock, will prove to be a major production advantage. The novel endophyte tall fescues are easy to establish, but it is important to use a system that completely removes the toxic plants in the pastures being converted. *Continued on page 3*

Upcoming Events (see website for details and online registration)

FEB 21 - Alfalfa & Stored Forage Conf., Lexington, KY
FEB 23 - Small Ruminant Grazing Conf., Morehead, KY
MAR 20 - Novel Tall Fescue Workshop, Princeton, KY
APR 9 - Spring KY Fencing School, Lexington, KY
APR 11 - Spring KY Fencing School, Burkesville, KY
APR 23 - Spring Grazing School, Princeton, KY
MAY 30 - Spring KY Fencing School, Russellville, KY

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Converting to Novel Endophyte Tall Fescue (continued from page 2)

It is also critical to provide careful management during establishment years to ensure a good initial stand.

To help farmers seriously interested in renovating some of their pastures with novel endophyte tall fescue, we have recently been working with a group formed in Missouri called the Alliance for Grassland Renewal and now comprised of representatives from multiple universities and seed companies. The goal of the group is to develop a self-imposed system of regulating seed quality, to develop educational programs to support producers in conversion projects, and to promote the concept of novel endophyte tall fescue. The alliance has been doing educational workshops across the southeast for five years and the next one in KY is in Princeton, March 20. For more information and to sign up, see the UK Forage Website. ~ Matt Poore, excerpt from article in Progressive Forage Grower, Dec. 2018

The Importance of Forage Analysis

Why analyze forages for their nutrient content? The obvious answer to this question is to use the results to balance rations for lactating cows as well as dry cows and heifers. The goal when balancing rations is to optimize cattle performance while keeping feed costs reasonable and using home-grown feeds available. As importantly as using the results to balance rations, these results should be used to evaluate whether the quality of forages harvested can be improved. These evaluations can be of forages harvested by others or those harvested as part of the home dairy farming operation. By using these results, one can determine if forages need to be harvested earlier/later, different varieties need to be used in the future, or changes in agronomic practices need to be instituted to prevent decreases in forage quality.

Key analyzes for evaluating forage quality? Energy is the hardest nutritional component to provide in diets for lactating and growing cattle. Higher quality forages are more digestible and support greater dry matter intakes. Thus, they allow greater quantities of forage to be included in the ration, lowering total feed cost and supporting cattle growth, greater early-lactation milk production, and improved reproductive performance compared to lower quality forages. ~ Dr. Donna Amaral-Phillips, excerpt of article KY Dairy Notes, available online.

Chewing some Cud on Mud

Many regions of the southern U.S. have experienced copious amounts of rain, which translates to mud in winter-feeding pastures. This creates problems for the cattle being fed and the owner, according to Kim Mullenix, extension beef specialist with Auburn University. “Excess mud can increase energy requirements because of the extra work to get to and from the feeding area. Mud also reduces the insulating value of the animal’s hair coat.” Dr. Mullenix cites some Univ. of NE research that showed 4 to 8 inches of mud can reduce feed intake by 10 to 15 percent.

Though mud is often just a tolerated fact of life on many farms, Dr. Mullenix says there are several strategies that can be implemented to limit losses in animal performance, reduce human stress, and minimize damage to pastures. Here’s her list:

1. Head for higher ground. Identify areas in the pasture that are well drained and tend to dry out faster when feeding hay during the winter. Low-lying areas are more prone to water retention and will not dry out as quickly.
2. When checking cattle, minimize heavy wheel traffic and ruts. Use smaller vehicles such as an ATV or check cattle on foot where possible.
3. Consider bale grazing. Setting out round bales prior to feeding on firm ground, then fencing them off with electric wire and moving to new bales one-by-one as needed may be a way to reduce mud. Several trials have noted that this works especially well in stockpiled fields where cattle can both graze and eat hay.
4. Construct a heavy-use feeding area. A heavy-use pad provides a feeding area for livestock that can reduce mud creation and erosion. Though concrete is the “Cadillac” construction base, a cheaper and effective material choice to reinforce frequent feeding areas is geotextile cloth and stone. Make sure the constructed area is large enough to be effective; a small pad may simply become surrounded by mud. While this option might not be available in the midst of the rain and mud, it’s something to consider for the future. ~ excerpt Hay and Forage Grower, Jan 2019, available online.

Insects in Livestock Feed and Hay

Insects show great promise as sustainable food sources for fish, poultry, and swine. Some species can efficiently convert food scraps and manure into nutritional supplements while significantly reducing volume and making it unsuitable as a breeding site for pests.

However, insects and mites in livestock feed are a different matter. Their activities can reduce nutritional quality, acceptability, and palatability of feed. In addition, some may serve as hosts for internal parasites. Early recognition of arthropod infestations in feed may prevent establishment of chronic infestations, further spread of the pests, and additional feed loss. Often, the best short-term recourse is to destroy infested feed and implement strong sanitation and prevention practices to prevent a recurrence. The full article looks at different species, including borers, mealworms, bran bugs, mites, and fungus beetles. ~ full article available in KY Pest News, Dec. 2018.