

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

 Cooperative  
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## Farm Update

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AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES  
EDUCATION

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### Pasture and Hay Land Management

Dr. Chris Teutsch, the Extension Forage Specialist stationed at the UK Research and Education Center, has a top 10 list of recommendations you can implement to make the most return on your forage production investment this year.

Tip #1. There are no silver bullets. There are products marketed as inexpensive alternatives for research-proven recommendations that simply don't work. Ask for data on products and seek research-based results. Reading a marketing advertisement that shows side-by-side comparisons or has a quote from a "satisfied product user" is not sound information to make a management decision on.

Tip #2. This is the year to soil test. Adopting the attitude not to test due to fertilizer cost is backward thinking. Soil pH is important for nutrient availability.

Tip #3. If your soil test indicates medium fertility but low pH, forgo purchasing fertilizer and instead apply lime to that field this spring. Ideal soil pH for grass and clover fields is 6.0 to 6.4. Acidic soils decrease nutrient availability, decrease microbial activity, and decrease nitrogen fixation.

Tip #4. Don't apply fertilizer if P and K test results are in the medium range or higher. UK soil fertility recommendations are based on crop yield response to fertilizer additions onto

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soil of various fertility levels. This research has been ongoing for many years and the data indicates that there is only a 50% chance that fertilizer applied to medium testing soil will have any yield benefit. Soil testing next year will be required to monitor levels if none is applied.

Tip #5. Implement Rotational Grazing. Twelve research projects conducted across the Midwest over the past thirty years collectively provide data that indicates a 30% increase in pasture productivity. Rotation allows grass to rest, promoting root growth and increasing the plant's ability to survive drought. Most importantly, rotating between smaller grazing areas improves manure distribution across the field rather than having grass consumed then carried a long distance to be deposited near loafing areas.

Tip #6. Never underestimate the fertility value in hay. One ton of grass hay contains 40 units of N valued at current prices of \$.50 per unit. 15 units of P valued at current prices of \$.65 per unit. 55 units of K valued at \$.45 per unit. That means every ton of hay brought out to the pasture to feed contains \$55 worth of nutrients. Always feed hay in the lowest fertility pastures; unroll hay if possible or bale graze by placing bales throughout the field providing access to a few at a time. You would never bring a fertilizer buggy to the field and empty it in one location. That is exactly what you're doing if you feed hay in the same spot year after year.

Tip #7. Incorporate legumes. If your weeds are under control it is time to implement legumes. Legumes utilize nitrogen from the air we breathe and retain it in the soil. This increases yield of surrounding grasses by the nitrogen in the legume plants being consumed then deposited back onto the field in manure and urine. It dilutes the harmful endophyte in tall fescue which causes a low-grade fever in beef animals.

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Tip #8. Frost seed clover this month. Graze pastures down close and seed 6-8# of red clover, or 1-2# of white clover, then continue grazing close this spring to reduce competition from surrounding grasses. Purchase only high-quality certified seed. Apply it at the correct rate and distribute it accurately. UK research found a 32% overlap reduction with the aid of an inexpensive GPS lightbar versus driving by line-of-sight when frost-seeding clover.

Tip #9. Manage Nitrogen application. Purchasing nitrogen for pasture is only a good investment if the grazing animals consume the early season excess growth. If grass production has been unused in the past, limit spring nitrogen and instead save some nitrogen money to apply this fall for stockpile growth to graze next winter.

Tip #10. Monitor hay fields closely. Once a pasture is managed with the tips described above, fertility levels will remain relatively stable. Unlike grazing, hay removes vast amounts of fertility from the field. Monitor closely to ensure fertility levels are maintained in hay fields.

## **Tobacco GAP meeting**

A regional tobacco GAP meeting will be at 6:00 p.m. next Thursday, February 6 at the Mclean County Extension office.

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