

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



August 6, 2022

Stockpiling for Fall and Winter Pasture

Many people who utilize forage land for hay or grazing production were disappointed with their yield this year. High fertilizer prices this spring caused many to refrain from applying typical nitrogen rates. The cool, wet April reduced hay and grazing field growth. Then a hot, dry June stopped cool season grass growth a month earlier than the typical summer slowdown. By the first two weeks of July, some were completely out of grazing forage and considering selling some cows or feeding already reduced winter hay inventory.

The last two weeks have returned much-needed rain to the county and forage lands are benefiting significantly, especially when coupled with the below-normal temperatures that trigger a return to growth for cool season grasses such as fescue. The soil moisture, temperature, and lower fertilizer prices compared to this spring are providing the perfect opportunity for a return on investment of fertilizer applied to stockpile a grass field or two for late fall or early winter grazing.

A soil test should be taken to ensure phosphorus, potassium, and lime are adequate. Nitrogen should be applied at a rate necessary to achieve 45 to 100 actual units of nitrogen. In Kentucky, research has shown fescue harvested in December produced 24.4 pounds of dry matter for each pound of nitrogen applied. The goal is to have nitrogen applied before mid-August for

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the greatest return on investment. Later applications are possible but the yield of forage per pound of nitrogen decreased rapidly after September 1.

Fields with a mix of grass and legume should be grazed soon after a killing freeze before the plants deteriorate. Grass fields can be grazed up through early winter but it is advised to only give access to limited field areas with the use of temporary electric fencing. Light stocking or unrestricted field access will result in trampling of forage which will not be utilized. Stockpiled grass is an excellent choice for fall-calving cows, after calving, or during the breeding season when their nutritional needs are greatest. Spring-calving cows that are thin in the fall may benefit from stockpiled grasses.

The high quality of stockpiled tall fescue produces good gains on both weaned stock and mature cows. This is a result of high crude protein and digestibility of fall fescue growth. The plant sugar content rises to very high levels due to lower temperatures and shorter day lengths. Sugar does not instantly increase after frost as commonly believed. It increases slowly with time.

Cows and calves will gain 1.2 to 1.7 pounds per day on stockpiled fescue and the greatest benefit is that it can reduce the number of hay feeding days. Other studies at the University of Kentucky have shown that grazing stockpiled fescue can reduce labor requirements up to 25% compared to conventional hay feeding. The researcher found that stockpiled fescue produced 66 days of grazing per acre for dry mature beef cows, gaining 1.24 pounds per day. In the same study, hay requirements were 564 pounds per cow between November 6 and February 10.

Rural Life Celebration

The Rural Life Celebration planning committee is excited to announce the event will return this year after being canceled due to COVID in 2020 and 2021. The event will be Sunday, August 7 at 5:00 p.m. at the Owensboro Convention Center. The event is free, open to the public, and

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serves as an opportunity for celebration of the rural lifestyle and fellowship with the great people from across our county and area. A meal, program, “Be Like Rick” and Lifetime Achievement Award presentations are on the agenda for the evening. There is no pre-registration.

Commercial Poultry Production Meeting

A poultry production meeting and trade show for commercial broiler, layer, and turkey producers will be held at Meyer Creek Park in Calhoun on August 30 from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. High temperatures this summer have been difficult for farms to manage. Often, cooling houses can increase humidity in the house, which is problematic. There is a fine line between keeping the houses at a comfortable temperature while not increasing humidity to a counterproductive level. Dr. Michael Czarick, University of Georgia Extension Engineer for Poultry Facilities, will be speaking on building ventilation and humidity management. Call the Mclean County Extension office at (270) 273-3690 to register. A lunch will be provided.

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