

What's Your Beef?

Howard County Beef & Forage Newsletter
Fall 2008

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300 Days of Grazing

The Agriculture and Natural Resource Committee has included 300 days of grazing in this year's educational program to reduce dependency on feeding all winter long. The first part of this program will include a tour to a farm that has been conducting this project and has been very successful for a number of years (15+ years). The operator, John Spain, lives in Northwest Arkansas. The tour is planning to leave here (Howard County) **Friday, October 31** and tour his place on Saturday,



November 1. I am trying to get a bus or van, so I will need to limit the number of participants to 14. It will be first-come, first-serve. There will be some cost involved. I will send a letter giving an approximate cost of the trip for those who sign up. Please sign up by **Tuesday, October 21, 2008**.

Bang's Vaccination

If you have heifers between 4 and 12 months of age and would like to have them vaccinated against Brucellosis, please call the office so that we can submit your name and calf number to Bink Thornton. Please call in by **Tuesday, October 21, 2008**.

Pesticide Applicator Training Scheduled

Thursday, November 13, 2008	EH House	6 p.m.
Thursday, December 4, 2008	Dierks Elementary School Cafeteria	6 p.m.
Thursday, January 29, 2009	EH House	12 noon
Monday, March 9, 2009	EH House	TBA

Fertilizer Cost Went Up Again – Now What?

Between June and August, the cost of urea fertilizer increased 30-40 percent after an already hefty jump from December 2007. All other fertilizer nutrients have followed the same trend. The cause is intermingled in global competition, fuel costs, and probably other factors. The end result is the same – even though proper fertilization is important for good forages, the cost is becoming unmanageable for many producers. So what are the options to feed your livestock?

The basic management tool for fertilizing – or not fertilizing – pastures is a soil test. Think of it as a fuel gauge for forages. Fields running on empty, so to speak, need more attention and also more expense than those with higher fertility levels. Knowing the fertility level and productivity potential allows you to decide if that field is worth fertilizing. Shallow, rocky ground will not produce high yield even with fertilizer, so you might decide against spending money on it versus a more productive field.

Think about the fertilizer value of hay. Yes, hay contains nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium – this can be converted back to serve as a low-level fertilizer. Based on forage tests conducted by the University of Arkansas, a 4x5 round bale of bermudagrass hay contains about \$35 worth of fertility. Rather than feeding hay in one spot all winter and allowing nutrients to stack up, consider moving hay feeding rings across a field to spread the nutrients. Some producers have used this method successfully to slowly build up fertility in “poor” fields.

Try to make livestock recycle nutrients. About 90 percent of the fertilizer nutrients in grazed forage are returned to the soil through manure and urine. By rotating livestock every few days, those nutrients can be spread across the pastures to improve uniformity of fertility, which also improves forage growth. A fairly quick pasture rotation using four to six pastures also lets the grass rest longer and grow more before being grazed again. That makes fertilizer more effective, since healthy forages use nutrients more efficiently.



Fields that are fertilized probably don't have the same fertility profiles. By using soil test information, you can see which nutrients are needed or not needed. In the past, triple 17 or triple 19 fertilizers were standard pasture fertilizers, whether or not the pasture needed all the nutrients they contained. Now phosphate costs over \$1 per unit, and potash is 80 cents per unit. An application of 250 pounds per acre of triple 17 fertilizer on a field not needing phosphorus wastes nearly \$45 per acre. Fertilizer costs too much to take the easy route; that is, just applying triple-something fertilizers without knowing the soil fertility levels.

Poultry litter can be a very valuable fertilizer... sometimes. The value depends on the distance the litter is to be hauled and whether or not you need nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. For example, the total value of N, P₂O₅, and K₂O in one ton of good broiler litter is over \$150, compared to the cost of those nutrients as commercial fertilizer. But if your soil fertility is high, and phosphorus and potassium are not needed, then litter is only worth about \$30 per ton for the nitrogen. This takes into account that about 60 percent of the nitrogen in poultry litter is available to the pasture. Litter is notoriously variable in nutrient content, so it is wise to get a nutrient analysis so you know what you are applying.

Culling unproductive livestock should be considered. Now it costs more than ever to keep cows that aren't having a calf every year. Keep calving records and weaning weight records for every cow. Cull those that don't have a calf first, and then consider which of those not raising a good calf should go next. Getting the stocking rate in line with the forage production you can afford is important. If you start overgrazing with less fertilization, calving rates may drop over time, taking calf-crop income with it.

Planting clover and legumes helps provide forage without adding fertilizer. This is where soil tests are valuable again. Some legumes will grow on low-fertility sites and others need high soil fertility. Lespedeza is commonly grown with fescue and does well on low-fertility soils. It makes good summer forage for goats, sheep, and cattle. Crimson clover will grow well on medium-fertility soil. White and red clover need medium to high fertility, and alfalfa needs the highest fertility of the legumes species grown in Arkansas. Legumes can be planted in October or in February. For bermudagrass sod, October is the preferred planting time, but legumes can be planted in fescue in fall or later winter. Legumes provide a fairly long grazing season (depending on the species), and much of the nitrogen provided will cycle through the grazing animals back onto the field. This makes rotational grazing valuable again. Many of the practices outlined here mesh well together but can be implemented one at a time.

Country Origin of Labeling (COOL) Frequently Asked Questions

I have been getting a lot of calls regarding COOL legislation, and our animal science section has put together a list of frequently asked questions with answers. If you have a question or concern not addressed here, please give me a call and I will do my very best to help you.



Q. What are the basic requirements of COOL?

A. The 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills amended the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 to require retailers to notify their customers of the country origin of beef, lamb, pork, chicken, goat, wild and farmed raised fish and shell fish, perishable agricultural commodities, peanuts, pecans, ginseng, and macadamia nuts. The implementation of mandatory COOL for all covered commodities except wild and farm-raised fish and shellfish was delayed until September 30, 2008. The term “perishable agricultural commodity” means fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables. Food service establishments are specifically exempted, as are covered commodities that are ingredients in processed food items.

Q. What commodities require country of origin of labeling?

A. Covered commodities include: muscle cuts of beef, lamb, pork, goat, and chicken; ground red and white meats; farm raised fish and shellfish; wild fish and shellfish; perishable agricultural commodities; peanuts, ginseng, pecans, and macadamia nuts.

Q. When does COOL go into effect?

A. The interim final rule for mandatory COOL for fish and shellfish became effective on April 4, 2005. The interim final rule for mandatory COOL for the remaining covered commodities that was published on August 1, 2008, took effect on September 30, 2008, as directed by the statute.

Q. What are the recordkeeping requirements for COOL?

A. Retailers must maintain records or other documentary evidence that permits verification of origin claims made at retail. These records may be maintained in any location and, unless specified otherwise, must be maintained for a period of one year from the date the declaration was made at retail. Upon request, these records must be provided to any duly authorized representative of USDA within five business days of the request.

Q. Can we use a National Animal ID system on our livestock of COOL verification purposes?

A. Producers and feedlots with animals that are part of a National Animal Identification System compliant system may rely on the presence of an official ear tag and/or the presence of any accompanying animal markings on which origin claims can be based.

My FuNnYbOnE



Only a Southerner...

Knows the difference between a hissy fit and a conniption fit – and that you don't "have" them, you "pitch" them.

Knows how many fish, collard greens, turnip greens, peas, beans, etc. make up a "mess."

Knows exactly how long "directly" is... as in "Going to town – be back directly."

Even babies know that "Gimme some sugar" is not a request for the white granular sweet substance that sits in a pretty little white bowl in the middle of the table.

Knows exactly when "by and by" is. We might not use the term, but we know the concept well.

Knows that in the South, y'all is singular... all y'all is plural.

Knows instinctively that the best gesture of solace for a neighbor who's got trouble is a plate of hot fried chicken and a big bowl of cold potato salad. If the neighbor's trouble is a real crisis, they also know to add a large bowl of banana puddin'.

All meetings and activities announced in this newsletter are open to all eligible persons without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability, marital or veteran status, or any other legally protected status. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (large print, audiotapes, etc.) should notify the county Extension office as soon as possible prior to the activity.

Sincerely,

Sherry Beaty

County Extension Agent-Agriculture