IN THIS ISSUE

FROM THE AGENT’S DESK

PLANNING FOR RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF FORAGES

SPRING PESTICIDE TRAINING FOR PRIVATE APPLICATOR LICENSES (PAT)

LATE WINTER-EARLY SPRING WEED CONTROL

300 DAY GRAZING DEMONSTRATION UPDATE FROM THE BATESVILLE LIVESTOCK AND FORESTRY BRANCH EXPERIMENT STATION

FROM THE AGENT’S DESK...

Well, another year is in the books, and for many it’s one that most wouldn’t mind just forgetting. Drought, armyworms, high priced everything, Mayans, elections, etc. have made for a quite a year. The good news is, it’s over and done with, and it’s time to look forward to another year. Undoubtedly, if farmers have to decide to hang on to cattle and stay in the game, many are going to be looking to re-establish some fields. Some may be looking to reload their herds with more head, and some may just sit back to wait and see how things pan out in the coming months. I’m no cattle economist and never...
would claim to be, but it seems that cattle prices are going to hold fairly close to where they’ve been. Rainfall forecasts are fairly unpredictable. A hundred different forecasters will have a hundred different forecasts. Here’s what you can expect. Rainfall or not, you can be assured that doing nothing is going to change nothing from its current state. If anything, it’ll make it worse. Really, one of 4 things is going to happen, in regard to rainfall and replanting:

1.) No re-establishment + Below average rainfall = Worse conditions than what you’ve currently got. Nothing you can do about that. Low risk.

2.) No re-establishment + Average or above average rainfall = Great environment for weeds and other undesirable species to move in and further establish themselves as your species of choice, and a “choice” is what it will be. Almost a worse option than number 1 because now, if you plan to EVER get back in the game, you’ve got re-establishment costs AND a weed control problem to contend with first. Loss on gains or low conception rates due to poor quality forage or increased cost of supplementation, either through grain or feed. Pick your poison.

3.) Re-establishment + Below Average rainfall = Herein lies the risky option, but again, doing nothing changes nothing. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, right?

4.) Re-establishment + Average or above average rainfall = Jackpot! Improving fields and making a dollar on gains and calving when you can to help offset those years when you don’t get the rain you need or when cattle prices don’t cover the cost of production (as if they ever really do...).

The point is: things aren’t going to fix themselves. If pastures are in bad shape, as most are, sitting on our hands and waiting for things to straighten themselves out is neither likely nor is it profitable. Predicting anything weather related past 10 days is a riskier business than farming. A lot of folks will say, “Prepare for the worst,” and that’s not a bad idea, but I think that many producers would be just as far ahead to plan for the best and be ready to cash in when things are good.

**PLANNING FOR RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF FORAGES**

Brad Runswick, CEA - Agriculture

So, if either number 3 or number 4 in the above section of this newsletter is going to be your option, here’s the next step. First of all, soil test. It’s a little late to be soil testing for spring, but go ahead if you haven’t already. What sense does it make to be spending money on seed and establishment if we don’t know the pH, phosphorus, and potassium values of our fields? Even if you can’t afford the lime and fertilizer, at least you’ll know where you stand and what you can expect. Not to mention, they’re free, to a degree. Your taxes are already paying for it; may as well use it. A soil sample should represent no more than 20 acres, and each sample should consist of 15-20 subsamples that have been extracted from all over the field and mixed together. Shoot for a depth of 0-8 inches. Soil sampling is only as good as the sampler. A half-hearted attempt at pulling samples results in skewed, inaccurate results.

Next, what do you have left and how much. We’ll start with cool season grasses, since they’re most likely
what many folks lost. If you aren’t sure what you’ve got, here’s a quick test. If it greens up in late February to March, it’s cool season. If it stays fairly dormant and doesn’t green up until April or May, it’s warm season.

**Cool Season Grasses (Fescue, Orchardgrass, or Mixed CSG)**

In most cases, if the stand is more than 75% lost, then a full pasture renovation is recommended. This may not be practical for everyone. Who wants to go disc up a bunch of rocks? Probably not many, so let’s just talk about broadcasting and no-tilling for now. Fescue is going to survive lower fertility, overgrazing, and drought better than orchardgrass. I don’t even think that’s a debate. The knock on fescue, as many well know, is endophyte toxicity. There are plenty of novel endophyte cultivars out there that reduce and nearly eliminate this toxic effect, but they aren’t nearly as persistent and hardy as ‘Kentucky 31’. Novel just means that they have the endophyte fungus in them but aren’t nearly as toxic to cattle. Don’t look at these novel varieties if you intend on treating them like most treat ‘Kentucky 31’. They need to be much managed much more closely: better fertility and better grazing management. Orchardgrass is an option, but it needs about the same attention as novel fescue cultivars.

It is preferred to re-establish fescue pastures in the fall, but spring plantings can be successful too. Weed competition is part of the tricky part about spring plantings. Also, trying to get the plants well established before running out of rain in June (on the average) is the other risky part. A good non-selective herbicide (Roundup) prior to planting will cut down on undesirable winter annual weeds and give the newly seeded fescue a good chance. Twenty (20) lbs./acre of pure live seed is the recommended rate for fescue. Shoot for planting sometime in March, as weather and rainfall permits. If the site is very rocky or you don’t expect getting good seed to soil contact, increase that rate. If broadcasting, it’s a good idea to lightly drag the field, broadcast, and then roll it. Fescue prefers to get good soil contact, more so than ryegrass. It is pretty good about germinating, but the better job you do to prepare the seedbed, the better stand you’ll get. If no tilling it in, make absolutely sure you aren’t planting any deeper than ½”. It would be better that the drill doesn’t even cut the soil and that the wheel just presses the seed into the soil surface. Make about a 20 yard pass, and then get off the tractor to check the depth of the seed. Orange spray paint on a handful or two of the seeds before putting it in the hopper will make it easy to spot!

**Warm Season Grasses (Bermudagrass, Native Warm Season Grasses)**

Whether we’re talking about native warm season grasses or bermudagrass, the establishment methods and timing for these are quite different from that of the cool season grasses. First and foremost, let’s just throw out the idea of broadcasting warm season species on an unprepared seedbed. Either no-till it into a killed existing sod or disc up the whole field and sow it in bare dirt, but don’t waste your time on broadcasting into an existing sod. Also, bermudagrass is very particular about potash levels. Low potash will result in thin stands. Remember that when considering soil test recommendations and fertilizer applications.
Seeded common bermudagrass seedlings, unlike well established bermudagrass sod, are weak and very non competitive. Nearly everything outcompetes a 3” tall bermudagrass seedling. They’ve got a tough go in life, at least at an early age. That’s why weed competition and timing of planting are so important. Planting needs to be done as soon as soil temperatures are expected to be 65 degrees or warmer. Usually this means that nighttime lows don’t get below 60 for at least 3-5 nights. If broadcasting it onto a prepared seedbed, you’ll need to seed it at around 6-8 lbs. PLS/acre.

If drilling seeded bermudagrass it, you can cut that down to 4-6 lbs./acre. Don’t plant any deeper than ¼” on any soils, and preferably no more than 1/8” on heavy soils. As with fescue, if drilling it, the wheel just needs to push the seed into the ground. Drilling doesn’t require any disking or dragging, but weed control is probably going to be necessary.

With both methods, weed competition and control is of the utmost importance. You’ve got to get most all of your weed control done prior to planting because options become limited after planting. We recommended 1 qt. glyphosate (Roundup) per acre approximately three weeks before planting. This allows enough time for additional weeds to emerge. Then hit them again with a second quart/acre of glyphosate, followed immediately by seeding. Don’t worry. Roundup residuals will be gone long before the seedling bermuda pops up. After germination, it is recommended to wait at least until the seedlings reach a 4-leaf stage before using any other herbicides. At the 4-leaf stage, you can get away with a pint of 2, 4-D amine, but you need to be sure and have the sprayer calibrated. Should annual grasses, such as crabgrass, foxtail, or ryegrass become a problem, you can flash graze the field. Turn in a large number of cattle to remove everything down to no less than 2”. This gives the bermudagrass a chance to get up ahead of the other species. Even mowing it with the bar raised above 2” is an option. Additionally, hold off on any nitrogen fertilizer applications until after the bermuda seedlings have grown stolons (runners) that are at least 3”. Fertilizing with nitrogen any earlier results in fertilizing weeds and other species that will then outcompete your bermuda investment. When it comes to seeded cultivars or varieties, look for ones with good winter hardiness, especially here in northern AR. Cultivars such as ‘Wrangler’, ‘Guymon’, and ‘Cherokee’ are just a few options for our area that have good winter hardiness that produce good yields.

Sprigging bermudagrass definitely creates more opportunities for variety selection. It opens the door for hybrid varieties that on the average will produce somewhere in the neighborhood of 1.3 times more dry matter than common seeded varieties. That is, if hybrid sprigs are compared against common seeded fields in the same growing environment. What happens a lot of times is folks go out and sprig a hybrid variety and baby it, and then turn around and compare those results to a common variety that was managed poorly.

Again, look for a variety with good cold tolerance. Finding a reliable, CLEAN sprig source is going to be an important decision to make as well. If you need some recommendations on where to find sprigging operations or choosing a variety, contact me here at the county office. Sprigging needs to be done at a rate of 20-40 bushels (1 bushel = 1.25 cubic feet or about 1000 sprigs) per acre in moist soil. With sprigging, there isn’t as much need to wait on warm soil.
temperatures. Early sprigging is usually best because the sprigs are made up of crown buds and rhizomes. This equates to more carbohydrates and sources for new buds to kick off new growth. The sprig will rely on its existing carbohydrate reserves until things warm up and it can break dormancy.

SPRING PESTICIDE TRAINING FOR PRIVATE APPLICATOR LICENSES (PAT)

Brad Runsick, CEA - Agriculture

The spring pesticide training will be held on February 7th, 2013 at the North Arkansas Electric Cooperative Orange Room at 6:00 p.m. This will serve as the only opportunity in Fulton County to get your license training this spring. The next chance will come sometime late fall 2013. If you can’t make this one, there will be one held by Izard County Extension in Melbourne at Ozarka College cafeteria on January 24th at 6:00 p.m.

For those who don’t know, a license is required to purchase restricted use pesticides. Two of the most common, 2, 4-D to control broadleaf weeds and lambda-cyhalothrin to control armyworms, are both restricted use.

Pesticide Applicator Training is approximately a two-hour course to certify Arkansas agricultural producers who wish to purchase and apply Restricted Use Pesticides (RUP’s). However, the information presented could also be useful for anyone interested in learning more about pesticide regulations, labeling, application equipment and safety issues. This training is NOT for certification of commercial (for-hire) pesticide applicators!

There is a $10 per person fee which must be paid at the door at the time of training. This fee is not related to the licensing fees charged by the State Plant Board. It is only for the training. The fee for the license is $10 for one (1) year or $45 for five (5) years. That amount you will pay in later to the State Plant Board, not the Fulton Co. Extension Office. Please feel free to call us at the office at 870-895-3301 if you’ve got any questions. There’s no need to call to pre-register.

LATE WINTER-EARLY SPRING SPRAYING

Brad Runsick, CEA - Agriculture

It is only mid-January, but now is the time to start thinking about spring weed control. Get out those sprayers, and make sure that everything is in working order because Mother Nature only leaves some short windows for spring spraying. Depending on temperatures, we’re only about 6-10 weeks from late winter/early spring spraying. Winter annual weeds, such as buttercup, and perennials, such as thistles are just itching to germinate and/or greenup during this time. Here in about 6 weeks, a lot of producers will look out across their pasture as they drive by and say, “There’s aren’t any weeds out there. I believe I’ll wait another month or so.” However, underneath that dormant base of grass, little ½”-1” winter annuals that have just started their lives and thistles rosettes would love a good dose of 2,4-D.

There are several benefits to an early spraying. You’ll reduce the nutrient and water competition with your desirable species, allowing them to kick off spring with some good greenup. Also, spraying these weeds when they’re young and tender allows for lower rates of herbicide. A pint of 2,4-D will kill more seedlings now than it will in mid-April. The downside is: you may get another round of germination after your first
spraying. If so, spray it again. A pint of 2,4-D amine is only about $3/acre chemical cost. You can curtail this, somewhat, by allowing as much winter annuals to germinate as possible before that first spraying. Just don’t let the earliest germinating ones get much over 3-4”. However, you probably need to plan on a mid-April to June spraying in addition to this one anyway to catch the ragweed, horse and bull nettle, wooly croton (goatweed), and Sericea lespedeza. If you need any help calibrating a sprayer, feel free to give me a call, and I can come out and help you out. I do ask that everything be in working order when I get there. For more information concerning weed control or sprayer calibration, give us a call here at the Fulton Co. Extension Office at 870-895-3301.

300 DAY GRAZING DEMONSTRATION UPDATE FROM THE BATESVILLE LIVESTOCK AND FORESTRY BRANCH EXPERIMENT STATION

Dr. Tom Troxel, Extension Beef Specialist

Livestock producers continue to suffer from increasing feed, fuel and fertilizer costs. Producers are challenged to determine what management adjustments are necessary for their operation. In order to survive, some producers chose not to make purchases (i.e. fertilizer), reduced livestock numbers, cut expenses at the risk of reducing livestock performance, or a combination of all three.

In July 2008, the Animal Science faculty began a project to apply research-based management practices to demonstrate 300 days of grazing conducted at the Livestock and Forestry Branch Station at Batesville, AR. The concept was to plan forage production in seasonal blocks of summer, fall, winter, and spring to match the nutrient demands of a fall-calving herd.

For the first four years of the project, the cow herd comprised of 38 mature cows with a fall calving season (September and October) and a late November to late January breeding season. Two Hereford bulls were leased and were tested for fertility and trichomoniasis prior to the breeding season.

Pastures consisted of 40 acres of common bermudagrass divided into four 10-acre paddocks, and 90 acres of cool-season forages comprised primarily of tall fescue divided into four 22.5 acre pastures. Red & white clover and alfalfa were added to the system in 2009 and 2010. In 2010, cool-season forage pastures included 33 acres of KY-31 endophyte infected toxic (E+) fescue, 12 acres of Ky-31 fescue/white clover, 22.5 acres of Novel endophyte (NE+) nontoxic fescue/red clover, and 18.5 acres of mixed grass of which about 5 acres was NE+ fescue (N9) and 4 acres of alfalfa. Cool-season pastures were managed for spring and fall grazing and for stockpiled forage. The bermudagrass pastures were managed for grazing from June through October.

All pastures were soil tested in 2008. Soil pH was > 6.0 and soil P was >100 lbs/acre for all pastures. Soil K was high in bermudagrass pastures, but was medium for fescue pastures. Nitrogen was applied at 50 lbs/a to bermudagrass in summer on 10-acre paddocks as needed. Nitrogen was applied in early September each year for stockpiled forage. Potash fertilizer was only applied to fescue pastures where clover was overseeded. Each of the pastures contained ponds or water tanks for livestock water. All pastures were fenced with electric fences and could be subdivided as necessary for rotational grazing management. The overall stocking rate was 2.7 acres/AU.
For the first four years of the demonstration, the number of hay feeding days was 28, 54, 35 and 42 days for year 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively. But how are we doing for 2012 – 2013?

**Drought Management Strategy**

After grazing 38 cows for 4 years, it was decided to increase the herd to 50 cows beginning July 1, 2012 without increasing grazable acres. What a terrible year to do that! Beginning on July 1, all cows were placed in a sacrifice pasture. It was decided to sacrifice a pasture for hay feeding and not graze any other pastures but allow the 3 to 4 inch grass residue to remain standing. Once rainfall returned, the pastures with the standing residue would respond faster than pastures grazed to the bare soil. In addition the standing residue helped keep soil temperatures cooler than soils without standing residue.

On August 1, 2012, 20% of the cow herd (10 cows) was sold. The money was used to pay for the hay and plant winter annuals (wheat and turnips). Below is the grazing and cattle management time table:

- **After feeding hay for 49 days (mid-August):** cows were turned out on the bermudagrass pastures for about 30 days
- **Late August:** wheat and turnips were planted as the hurricane was coming ashore.
- **September and October:** calving season
- **Mid-September (after the prussic acid damage was over):** cattle cleaned up fields that contained Johnsongrass
- **Mid-October:** cattle returned to the bermudagrass pastures
- **Mid-November:** cattle grazed Alfalfa then wheat and turnips. The number of grazing days on the alfalfa was cut in half because the deer got the other half.
- **December 1:** cattle cleaned up fields that contained fescue and Johnsongrass
- **Mid-December:** cattle grazing stockpiled fescue
- **Mid-January or hopefully a little later:** cattle will receive hay and supplement

There should be plenty of spring forage (as long as it rains), therefore, 30 days late winter hay feeding may be all that is required. If that is the case, the 300 day grazing demonstration would have fed hay 79 days during one of the worst droughts in Arkansas history.

There are currently 40 cows and calves grazing the demonstration. In April the calves are generally administered an 8-way clostridial vaccine and a killed vaccine containing respiratory viruses, leptospirosis, and vibriosis. In addition, all cows and calves will be dewormed and blood samples will be collected from the cows to determine pregnancy. Cows and calves will be weighed. We hope to return to 50 cows but pasture recovery must proceed restocking. To learn more about the 300 Day Grazing Demonstration and other research at the station plan to attend Livestock and Forestry Branch Station on April 16, 2013.

(Note: If any of you would like to attend this field day on April 16th, you’re welcome to ride with me. I’ve got 3 spots in my truck. First-come, first-serve. There’s no cost to attend this field day, and usually lunch is provided. More details to come in the April newsletter.)
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