I hope everybody has had a good holiday season so far and that you are about ready for Christmas. Recently I have been getting some questions about adding legumes to pastures and the steps that need to be taken to accomplish this. I thought that this would be a good topic for my last newsletter of the year.

The University of Arkansas has been promoting their 300 days of grazing program for several years now. This program has been very successful and been accepted by other states as well. This program utilizes several steps in combination to achieve this goal of grazing animals for this amount of time. One of these steps involves interseeding legumes, more commonly clovers, into existing pastures.

By adding legumes into existing sod a producer can benefit in several ways including: improving the quality of hay and pasture, improving animal performance, extending grazing seasons, and reducing the need for nitrogen fertilizer. In order to get a good stand one must take certain steps to ensure the best opportunity is given to the young seedlings.

**Take a Soil Test.-** Most legumes have a higher soil fertility requirement that grasses, so a soil test is the first step. Soil pH should be above 6.2 and phosphorus and potassium levels should be near optimum for best results. By taking samples from several different fields you can determine where the legumes have the best chance of growing and also where major fertility changes are needed.

**Use the correct code.-** When turning our sample into the local Extension office it is important that they use the right analysis code when preparing your paperwork for the lab. The soil lab uses several different codes when making recommendations and each one will yield a different recommendation. When turning in your sample make sure and ask for code #116 to ensure that you get the right recommendations given back to you.

**Control your weeds.-** Weed problems should be addressed and controlled before planting. Winter annual weeds such as buttercup, henbit, and thistles can be sprayed during December and early January with 2,4-D, then clover can be seeded in late February or early March. A combination of good soil fertility, well-timed herbicide application, and good grazing management is the most effective weed control program.

**Select the right legume.-** Select a legume species that is adapted to your area and find a local source well in advance of planting. Your local dealer might not have the variety that you wish to plant in stock so check with them well before time to plant. Annual legumes include crimson and arrowleaf clover, annual lespedeza or hairy vetch. Other annual clovers include subterranean, rose, ball, or Berseem. Perennial legumes include white and red clover or alfalfa.

**Inoculate.-** Make sure the seed is inoculated. You can now buy seed that is coated with the right inoculant and also lime. If you do not buy the pre–inoculated seed make sure to buy the right inoculant when you get your seed. Check the label on the inoculant package to match it with your seed. For example, red clover inoculant will not work for crimson or arrowleaf clover.

**Plant at right time.-** Schedule a window of time for planting. For fall planting, late September to mid- October works well most years. For winter planting the month of February to early March works well.

**Control grass height.-** The grass sod needs to be grazed or clipped short, preferably down to 2 inches or less, before interseeding the legume. Short sod allows the seed to reach the soil easily.

**Planting depth.-** Make sure to get good seed/soil contact, but don’t plant the seed too deep. For broadcasting seed, pull a drag or harrow over the field before or simultaneously when planting. For planting with a no-till drill set the drill so that the disk openers barely cut the sod or even so that they don’t cut the sod. Use more down pressure on the press wheels to push the seed into the soil surface rather that depending on the disk openers. Clover seed should not be planted over ¼” deep.
Sod Management- Graze across the field in early spring to control fescue, ryegrass, and weeds before the clover comes up. This allows more light to reach the legume seedling. Remove the cattle when the legume is emerging well.

Rotational Graze- In the spring rotationally graze your fields to improve legume persistence. If the legume is in a hay field, make sure the field is fertilized according to soil test recommendations. This means do not apply nitrogen fertilizer. Nitrogen will cause excess competition from the grass, resulting in shading and loss of the legume.

If these steps are taken a producer can be very successful at introducing and improving their pastures by utilizing legumes. If taken care of properly some legume species, such as white clover, can reseed themselves to help maintain stands over time. This can give a producer several years of benefit from just one planting.

To find out more information on interseeding legumes and drill calibrations ask for the publications FSA3111 Calibrating Drills and Broadcast Planters for Small-Seeded Forages and FSA3134 Interseeding Clover and Legumes in Grass Sod at your local county Extension office.

Looking back on the year it has been a successful one. Cattle prices remain high which means more dollars in your pocket. The prices have dropped recently but I expect them to bounce back and remain strong for a while longer. Right now is the time you need to make all of the improvements that you can and squeeze every dollar of profit out of your operation. As with everything else in the world, one day the market will change again and prices will fall. Running a cattle operation efficiently takes management on many different levels.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Lawrence and Randolph County Extension offices will be offering two Pesticide Applicator Training classes in January. This class is needed for anyone who produces an agricultural commodity and wishes to use restricted use pesticides. This is not for homeowners. Classes times will be at the following times:

January 13th at 6 PM at the Powhatan Community Center
January 27th at 6 PM at Black River Technical College Auditorium

On Friday February 6th the Lawrence/ Randolph County Extension offices in cooperation with the area Chamber of Commerce will hold an Ag Expo. There will be specialists there covering crops, livestock, and gardening. Among the subjects that will be discussed will be weed control, parasite control, forages, etc. There will be something for everyone. Lunch will be provided by Fred’s Fish House. Vendors will be on hand to promote their products and answer any questions that you might have. This program is free to attend. Pre-registration is not required but would be appreciated. To pre-register please contact the Lawrence County Extension office at 886-3741 or the Randolph County Extension office at 892-4504.

On March 12th I will be having a summer weed control meeting. Blair Griffin, Johnson County Staff Chair, will be conducting the meeting. We will cover the most common weeds seen for this area and ways to control them. Mr. Griffin has extensive knowledge of weed control. If you are having a problem with a particular weed you are welcome to bring it to the meeting to be identified and control measures needed.

On March 19th Dr. Troxel will be at the Lawrence/ Randolph County Cattlemen’s meeting discussing Expected Progeny Data, or EPD’s. He will be discussing how to read the data and how to compare it with what your herd needs to help improve the traits that are most important to your herd or animal.

I hope that this letter gave you a new tool to add to your arsenal to get you one step closer to making the most out of your operation. If you have any questions please contact Bryce Baldridge at the Lawrence County Extension office at 886-3741. From my family to yours I wish all of you a very safe and Merry Christmas. I will see you next year.

Sincerely,  

Bryce Baldridge  
CEA—Livestock

The Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, disability, marital or veteran status, genetic information, or any other legally protected status, and is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.