This is the time of year where I always get questions regarding fall and winter pastures. Grazable pastures during the fall and winter months don’t happen by accident, a lot of planning goes into making this attainable. First a producer has to decide what to plant and then how much is needed. Matching winter annual production with livestock needs can be a challenge. The following observations from the University of Arkansas research and farm demonstrations will be useful for developing a fall and winter grazing program.

**Forage Brassicas**
Forage turnip and rape must be planted early for fall grazing. Brassicas planted in late August to early September can produce grazable forage by late October. Tillage is required for good establishment. Light disking may be adequate. Clean tilled seedbeds are best. Brassicas can be grazed from October through December. A combination planting of forage brassica and ryegrass has proven to be an effective practice. The brassica produces forage for fall grazing and the ryegrass produces forage for spring grazing. Forage brassica varieties are much more productive than “garden-type” varieties.

**Small Grains and Ryegrass**

**For grazing by November 1-15:**
Small grains and ryegrass intended for grazing by early November must be planted before September 15. Planting on a tilled seedbed or no-till into harvested crop fields will be required for this to work. Apply 50 lbs. per acre N after the stand comes up to ensure growth. Apply P and K according to soil test. If no soil test is available, be sure to apply at least 50 lbs. each of P and K. Apply 50 lbs. more N in February for sustained growth into spring. Due to the tillage requirement, this option will not fit every case or every field. However, selecting specific fields for this early planting option may fill a void until other forage is available.

**For grazing by December 1-15**
Winter annuals intended for grazing in early December can be inter-seeded into warm-season grass sod or planted in crop fields from September 15 to October 1. The grass sod should be suppressed with a low rate of glyphosate herbicide or with moderate disking when planting this early to prevent competition with the small grain seedlings. Planting can be done with a no till drill or by disking followed by broadcast of seed and dragging with a harrow. Apply 50 lbs. per acre N after the stand comes up to ensure growth. Apply P and K according to soil test. If no soil test is available, be sure to apply at least 50 lbs. each of P and K. Apply 50 lbs. more N in February for sustained growth into spring.

**For grazing by February to early March**
Planting annuals after mid-October into November will allow good establishment, but forage production will be delayed until February or early March. Fertilizer application can be delayed until February since growth potential is limited during mid-winter.
How much to plant

Research has shown that a good measure for determining planting acreage is 1/10 acre per cow per day of the week to be grazed through the winter. For example, if cows will be limit grazed 3 days per week then plant 3/10 acre per cow. More grazing time requires more acreage. Dr. Paul Beck’s work has shown that cows limit grazed on winter annuals 2 days per week and fed hay the remaining time perform quite well. In that study, the “grazing day” was an 8 hour day and not a 24 hour period. As forage growth increases during the early spring, cows can be allowed to graze more frequently. This is an effective way to match the increased nutrient requirements of spring calving cowherds and to supplement low quality hay.

This time last year, I got several calls regarding cattle that had possibly been poisoned by Dallisgrass. This type of poisoning only happens when cattle consume the seed heads of Dallisgrass. Ergot poisoning or Dallisgrass staggers has been a real problem this summer. The rainy summer weather let Dallisgrass flourish and the seed heads are commonly infected with ergot. The ergot fungus infects the flowers of Dallisgrass and the growing fungus replaces the seed. Ergot poisoning is more prevalent following summer rainy periods. Forage quality and palatability of Dallisgrass are very good for most grazing livestock. In summer, Dallisgrass seed heads are often covered in a “honeydew” exudate from the fungus that leaves a sticky film on hands and clothing after walking through fields of Dallisgrass seed heads (Figure 1). As the fungus develops, it turns dark or orange from late summer to fall (Figure 2) as the sclerotia mature in the seed head. The sclerotia (resting body of the fungus) drop to the soil and overwinter. When weathers warm the following summer, the sclerotia germinate and produce spores which infect Dallisgrass seed heads during the blooming period. The most common scenario of ergot poisoning occurs when new cattle are brought onto a farm that have not been exposed to Dallisgrass and are turned into a field that is at the full seed head stage. Cattle have the habit of selectively grazing seed heads which leads to a very high dosage of ergot alkaloids. Even on farms where cattle are previously exposed to Dallisgrass, poisoning can occur when animals are hungry and are turned into a field full of seed heads. Symptoms are much less common in herds exposed to Dallisgrass in mixed grass pastures. Clinical symptoms associated with Dallisgrass Staggers involve the animal’s nervous system. In the very early stages of the disease, the only sign seen may be trembling of various muscles after exercise. As the disease progresses, muscle tremors worsen so that the animal becomes uncoordinated and may show continuous shaking of the limbs and nodding of the head. When forced to move, the severely affected animal may stagger, walk sideways, and display a “goose-stepping” gait. Incoordination can be severe enough that the animal will fall down when attempting to walk. Some animals may be found down and unable to stand. Diarrhea may be noted in some affected animals. Death can occur in severe cases especially in scenarios where cattle are naïve to grazing Dallisgrass as previously described. There is no cure for ergot poisoning, but removing cows from infected pastures when symptoms are first noticed usually results in uneventful recovery in three to five days. Clipping seed heads to prevent animals from grazing them helps prevent the problem from occurring. Ergot toxicity from Dallisgrass hay is very uncommon since the total intake of hay forage dilutes any ergot contained in the hay.
HORSE FLIES

I’ve been receiving calls from cattle producers and horse owners wanting to know what to do about the horse flies. Horse flies can be a nuisance to both humans and livestock. Aside from the painful bite they inflict on us or our livestock, they can transmit several pathogens that cause disease including anaplasmosis and equine infectious anemia in horses.

Horse flies are effective mechanical disease vectors because they take large blood meals and, as a result of their painful feeding, are often interrupted during feeding. They inject an anticoagulant to prevent blood clotting, sponge up the blood and feed until they are replete with blood. If they are interrupted they will fly to another spot on that animal or an entirely different animal to feed.

Horse flies can be controlled on humans by wearing light colored clothing, and repellent with formulations containing DEET or permethrin (Permanone and others). Formulations containing DEET can provide a few hours of protection. Products containing permethrin should be applied to clothing and allowed to dry. Never apply directly to skin.

Although difficult, horses and other livestock can achieve some protection with pyrethroid insecticides (such as permethrin). These insecticides are often irritating to horse flies and will cause them to leave before they have a chance to bite. Often the flies are only repelled from the treated areas and will bite the untreated areas of the animals such as the legs or underbelly so thorough coverage is important.

Forced-use self-treatment sprayers have been used with some success to manage horse flies on cattle. Some products such as: ultra-boss, absorbine ultra shield, and pyranha also contain a synergist (piperonyl butoxide) and an oil based carrier which provide longer lasting effects. Always read the label and follow all directions and precautions when using these insecticides.

On the thing to remember is that horse flies do not like shaded areas and seldom enter barns. Providing areas like this may be a very economical way to control horse flies. By leaving gates open for animals to enter a barn or shed or just by giving them more shade to rest during the day can decrease the pressure that the animals receive from horse flies.
ANNOUNCEMENTS

**BULL FERTILITY TEST** There will be a bull fertility test at the Sloan-Hendrix Agricultural Building on **September 27th, 2014**. The clinic will start at 9 am. Dr. Roger Helms will be the attending Veterinarian. Each animal will receive an external evaluation. Producers have the option of 1 test or all tests; semen testing is $40.00, vaccinating is $10.00, and trich testing is $50.00. This is an excellent time to prepare for the fall breeding season. Please call the Extension office at 886-3741 to schedule a time to examine your bull or if you have any questions.

**Brucellosis Vaccinations will be October 6th.**

The Lawrence County Extension Office will be conducting its fall Brucellosis vaccinations on October 6th 2014. These vaccinations are free and are for heifers that are between the ages of 4-12 months. Please call the Lawrence County Extension Office by Friday, October 3rd to get on the list for Monday, October 6th. You will be given an approximate time of arrival the day before the vaccinations. Call 886-3741 to participate.

If you have any questions regarding anything in this newsletter please call the Lawrence County Extension Office at 886-3741. Thanks for reading the newsletter and keep these dates handy. I am looking forward to seeing you at one of the events above soon!

Bryce Baldridge
CEA– Livestock/4-H