Pike County Ag and Natural Resources Newsletter

May/June 2016

Calendar of Events

5/7  PC 4-H Orama
5/15 ASF Steer Ownership/DNA Deadline
6/4  4-H Lake Day
6/14 District 4-H Orama @ Hope HS
6/16 Horticulture Field Day SWREC, Hope
6/29 4-H Field Trip, Old Washington SP

CATTLE TO DO LIST

- Vaccinations for replacement heifers
- Deworm all livestock
- Process steers before temps warm up
- Overseed bare spots with grass of choice
- Inventory forages
- Analyze winter feeding program

Evaluating Summer Forages for Beef Cattle

The winter feeding is over, spring has brought green pastures, and summer is just around the corner. Arkansas summer forages such as Bermuda, will soon begin to take off. Many cattlemen seize the opportunity to utilize as much of the free forages as possible. In this issue, we will explore what forages are available, how to best utilize them, and some alternatives when they run out.

Some other summer annual grasses in Arkansas include Sudangrass, Pearl millet, and Sorghum. These summer annuals can provide producers with supplemental grazing, hay, or silage for livestock. An important principle in grass management is keeping livestock and equipment from cutting the blades too short. As noted in the UAEX publication Management of Hay Production (MP434), many plants store energy at the base of the plant or in the stolons. Removing this energy slows the regrowth response in these forage grasses. Some grasses such as Sudangrass, Pearl millet, and Sorghum require an even greater mower height of 6-8 inches. Many Pike County fields are consumed with Johnson grass. Raising the cutting bar to 6-12 inches can help reduce the amount of nitrates harvested in this hay.

By planting supplemental annual grasses, producers can allow cool season and warm season grasses a much needed rest. Allowing established perennials time to gain energy and begin the regrowth phase could result in significant gains in dry matter for livestock consumption. Many area producers are also finding that alternative forages such as Brassicas, including turnips, rapes, hybrids, and radishes, or Jerry oats can help stockpile Bermuda in the late summer months and extend the amount of time cattle are grazing and not utilizing costly roughages such as hay and silage. To learn more about Summer Annual Grasses, refer to FSA2032. This and many other Fact Sheets can be found on our website, uaex.edu or contact your Pike County Ag agent at 870-285-2161.
Five Steps for a 300-Day Grazing Season

1. Inventory the forage base to find what forages are available for grazing during each season. Contact your local Ag Agent to help with a Pasture Inventory.

2. Improve forage management practices to extend the grazing season with the existing forages. Always think a season ahead.

3. Add complementary forages to fill in seasonal gaps if needed

4. Plan forage and grazing practices ahead for the year and get the schedule on the calendar. Summer forages should have already been planned. Soon we will be thinking about what we need for the fall.

5. Monitor and adjust forages and livestock as needed by keeping records of each practice

Selecting the right grass for your operation

The most popular forage for Southwest Arkansas cattlemen is Bermuda grass. Known for its ability to survive a dry Arkansas summer and quickly recoup after a late August rain, Bermuda offers a stable and sustainable forage for livestock producers. The only question that remains is – which variety should I plant. In a recent study at the UA Research and Experiment Station in Hope, area Ag agents found a definite trend. Sprigged variety out produced all seeded varieties when compared on a dry matter basis. Some varieties out produced popular seeded varieties by nearly 1000lbs/ac.

However, when comparing the nutritional value of the end product seeded variety contained more crude protein and more importantly, greater TDN.

As seen in the chart on the bottom, almost all varieties produced the needs for a lactating cow. A producer could justly conclude that a variety which produces the nutritional needs and out performs in terms of dry matter production would be a good choice. Another factor that should be considered when choosing which variety to add to your pasture is economics. How much more does it cost to sprig my field? Can I even find sprigs or a sprigger? The answer is not always found in what the data suggest, but rather what resources are available. Simply put, seeded hybrids are readily available and cost less to establish. For more information on the Bermuda Trials at SWREC, come by Pike CES.
I have been asked several times what my goals are as an Ag Agent. If I have learned anything in life, it is simply that when I think I have everything planned out—chaos soon ensues. My hope is that the farmers and ranches in Pike County will make wise decisions by taking a scientific approach to the best management practices they deploy. By identifying the problem, researching possible solutions, implementing the practice and then evaluating the outcome, producers can determine what works best for their operation. I serve the producers and home owners of Pike County by aiding in that scientific process. By disbursing research and data or simply weighing the pros and cons with a client, we can come to a solution to the problem at hand.

In this issue, I have tried to present the facts for the base of a good cattle operation—forages. Plants are the beginning of all food chains. To produce good livestock, we must produce good forages. If you have any questions about forages, feel free to call 870-285-2161 or email me tadavis@uaex.edu. I would love to work with you to evaluate your current situation and see what we can do to help you improve your operation.

Terrell Davis, Staff Chair
Pike County Extension Service

“...the cheapest of all feed is pasture because it furnishes a balanced ration at low cost and the cow does her own harvesting.... In comparatively few cases is the fullest possible use made of pasture. “

- USDA Yearbook of Agriculture, 1922

4-H SPOTLIGHT

Summer means 4-H Activities. Here is a list of our planned summer activities as well as important dates for livestock exhibitors.

Steers—Ownership deadline is 5/15. DNA kits must be ordered by 5/15 and submitted by 5/31. Online nomination deadline is 5/31

Market Lambs, Goats, Hogs—Ownership deadline is 7/1. DNA kits must be ordered by 7/15 and submitted by 7/31. Online nomination deadline is 7/31

Lake Day will be June 4 with details TBA later. The 4-Hers will take a trip to Old Washington on June 29. And Fun Day will be July 20th.

To enroll your child in 4-H online visit arkansas.4honline.com

Matching Your Forage Options to Your Cows Needs

We all know the essential nutrients—carbs, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals, and water. Ask most producers which nutrient is the most important and many times the response will be protein. Of course protein, it builds muscle and muscle means money! Sorry, that logic just doesn’t add up. Though protein is important, TDN or energy is the most important factor when comparing feedstuffs. The body must meet its basic needs before anything else can happen. Carbs provide energy and is often the forgotten nutrient. Sometimes water can also be placed on the back burner. Without this vital nutrient, all other processes stop. Its like having a tank of fuel with no hose to connect to the engine. Just because a nutrient is expensive doesn’t make it more important. How do we know if we really need that protein tub or not? A great place to start is with testing a hay sample. UAEX will test your hay for a small fee and give you the data you need to make the right decision. Why spend money for nutrients that will just be turned into waste? Get the most bang for your buck and match your forages to your cows nutritional requirements. Her greatest need is during lactation, while her lowest need is open and dry.
2301 South University Avenue  
Little Rock, AR 72204

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### Forage Production Planning Calendar

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